

Whisked Away

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Whisked Away

by [shiphitsthefan](#)

Summary

Alana takes a few more sips before setting the coffee back onto the saucer. “So you believe in psychics? Or, at least, don’t disbelieve in them.”

“I suppose that there could be individuals who do more than read physical tells, make educated guesses, and ask leading questions,” Hannibal says. He raises his cup back to his lips. “Why do you ask?”

Alana laces her fingers together on top of the table. “His name is Will Graham.”

Will has always seen too much of the lives of others to ever want one of his own. On the other hand, Hannibal, as proprietor of Whisked Away, his hobby coffee shop and café, is living the public life he's always wanted. Still, he longs to be seen and understood for who he really is.

Neither ever saw this coming.

Notes

I had a hard couple of days last week and needed to take a short break from [Smut Fu: The Legend Continues](#). The Cannibal Pub decided to hold [a mini challenge](#), and this fic is what happened. I'm four chapters in, and I have no idea where I'm going, but I'm having an excellent time.

Look, every fandom needs a psychic coffee shop AU, okay? Don't question it.

Thanks, as always, to my betas, my favorite fannibal [Llewcie](#) and my drift partner [betts](#). Y'all are the best. <3

ETA: As of August 12th, anonymous commenting is no longer allowed on this fic. If you're wondering why, check out the comments on chapter six. My tumblr inbox remains open to anons, however. I'm sorry to have had to do this, but it's for my own mental health. Thank you for your support and understanding. <3

Chapter 1

Whisked Away certainly isn't the most profitable coffee shop in the world, but Hannibal never intended for it to be. This is his retirement, after all, and he has a not-inconsiderable nest egg. Even if he didn't, Hannibal would find it difficult to care--his artsy, off-the-wall, possibly over-pretentious cafe is perfect for him; Whisked Away attracts the most interesting, educated characters Hannibal has ever had the pleasure of knowing. He has the distinct pleasure of calling some of them friends.

Alana Bloom, for instance. She came in one day to get out of the rain, and she and Hannibal struck up a conversation about the M.C. Escher exhibit on loan to the Baltimore Museum of Art, Hannibal having noticed her *Sky and Water I* scarf. It was only natural for their conversation to move on to the study of mathematics, and soon after, medicine, at which point they discovered they shared a common field. Alana comes in on her lunch break every weekday now, often to discuss newly published psychological studies, as well as her own research. Hannibal may not keep up with the journals or the field itself any longer, but Alana is bright and warm and engaging, and he always enjoys learning something new.

So when she graces Whisked Away on a Saturday, after months of never appearing over the weekend, Hannibal knows there must be a reason.

It's a slow day--the weekends are always slow, but Hannibal still opens for breakfast and lunch to keep himself busy--so he takes off his apron and comes around the counter to join her at a table. That's another indication that something is wrong; Alana always sits on the third stool at the counter so as to talk with Hannibal.

"You seem troubled," he says, signaling for her to stop so he can pull out her chair.

"Thanks, and yes," she confirms. "Maybe not so much troubled as concerned." Alana slumps back in the tufted side chair; her arms fall suddenly when she attempts to place them on armrests that don't exist, and she sighs.

"I will turn the sign so we can speak freely," says Hannibal, taking wide strides to the door.

Alana twists around to watch him. "Oh, no, I don't want to put you out of business for the day."

"It is no trouble. I had considered closing early to perfect a new recipe already." The hand-lettered sign turned, he moves to draw the linen shades. "Would you care for your usual?"

"Maybe just a coffee. I don't think I could handle your pesto today."

"Very well. Perhaps some small talk while I prepare it? To help you unwind." He doesn't wait for Alana's answer, simply walks back around the counter to pull out his mortar and pestle.

She slides into her spot, elbows on the counter, chin resting in her hands. "Somehow I don't think this is going to be my usual," Alana says, amused.

“Hardly. Tell me, Miss Bloom--have you ever had Türk kahvesi?”

“No, but I have the feeling I’m about to.”

Hannibal takes his home-roasted coffee beans from their place of honor on the shelf behind him, and begins preparations. “Türk kahvesi is simply another manner of preparing unfiltered coffee. Water and finely ground coffee--”

“Ah, that’s why the mortar and pestle.”

“Indeed,” says Hannibal, ignoring her rude interruption. “They are brought to a simmer along with sugar, if desired.” He smiles at her as he continues grinding the beans into a fine powder. “Seeing as you enjoy a little coffee with your sugar, I will be preparing this çok şekerli.”

Alana smiles back, more at ease than she was when she walked in. “Very sweet then.”

Hannibal nods. “There are special tools used to prepare this, as well.”

“Which is the real reason you like it, probably.” When Hannibal looks up and blinks at her in his closest approximation of a glare, Alana laughs. “Oh don’t deny it, Hannibal, you’re incapable of using equipment that multitasks. Alton Brown would hate you.”

Another annoyed look, and then he continues. “The mixture is heated in a cesve. I will then serve us in a cup called a fincan. After waiting for the grounds to settle, we can enjoy it.”

Alana wrinkles her nose. “I thought the point was to avoid drinking grounds in coffee.”

“As it is with this, as well. The grounds are used for kahve falı.” Noticing Alana’s perplexed look, he adds, “Tasseography.” She raises her eyebrows and gestures for him to continue, so he explains, “Fortune telling.”

“And do *you* use it to predict the future, Hannibal?” Alana asks Hannibal’s back.

“I would not be above doing so,” he says, combining all of the ingredients and turning to place the cesve on the stove.

“Seriously?”

Hannibal looks at her over his shoulder as he fills the fincans with heated water. “There are a great many things that cannot be explained by modern science. It would be foolish to not believe in the possibility of the supernatural.”

“You want to believe, then?” Alana asks, still skeptical.

He exhales, considering his words. “It isn’t so much that I *want* to as much as I have found little reason *not* to. Just because I do not believe in the mercy of God doesn’t mean that I disbelieve in the existence of a power greater than ourselves, of a divine creator. It is the same with this; I believe in science, but I do not disbelieve in the possibility of that which is unexplainable.”

Alana seems to have nothing to say to that, so Hannibal finishes making the coffee, the only sound that of the hiss of near-boiling water, the rushing buzz of traffic outside, and the very low strains of *Dialogues des Carmélites* over the speakers. He pours the water out of the fincans, then pours the foaming coffee into each, and places them on tiny saucers. Again, he pulls out Alana's chair, then returns with their coffees and two small glasses of water.

"It is best to take a tiny sip of the water first," Hannibal says as he serves her. "This cleanses the palate so as to best enjoy the unique flavors of the coffee." He sits across from her and adds, "Bon appétit." He raises his glass of water to her, and she shakes her head, grinning, but raises hers, as well.

And then they sit, passing no words, drinking nothing beyond the water. Though he is curious as to the particular trouble which spurred her visit, Hannibal feels it would be rude to ask; likewise, while he would like to begin his coffee, as it is best piping hot, Alana's still sits untouched. Manners, while critical, so often get in the way of enjoyment.

Finally, Alana picks up her coffee and takes a sip. She makes a quiet noise of approval.

"I am glad you like it," Hannibal says, finally sipping at his own.

Alana takes a few more sips before setting the coffee back onto the saucer. She folds her arms on the table and leans in slightly. "So you believe in psychics? Or, at least, don't disbelieve in them."

He licks his lips, then takes another sip, letting the rich coffee spread over his tongue slowly before swallowing. "I find many of them to be false prophets. At least, the more common garden variety found over telephone and on television."

"But a real one could exist?"

"I suppose that there could be individuals who do more than read physical tells, make educated guesses, and ask leading questions," he says. Hannibal raises his cup back to his lips. "Why do you ask?"

Alana settles back in her chair again, coffee abandoned on the table. "I probably shouldn't be telling you this," she begins, "but I feel like it's necessary. Do you remember Beverly?"

"Your charming colleague from the gender studies department?"

"That's the one. Anyway, she introduced me to..." Alana hesitates. "I suppose you could call him a friend. He's more than her acquaintance, but only barely. But we're bringing him in for breakfast tomorrow, during church hours when it's slowest."

"I am always happy to meet your friends," Hannibal assures her. "Even your almost ones."

Alana chuckles. "That's really the best way of putting it. Don't get me wrong," she says, "he's a nice guy. The kind that would put his jacket in a puddle to let you walk over it. Picks up stray dogs on the side of the road when he actually drives and takes them home--Beverly says he practically has his own pack."

“But?”

She looks away, sighing again. Hannibal can read guilt in the lines on her face, can almost smell the stress. “He’s had a...an exceptionally rough life. He can be blunt, kind of rude, but it’s sort of a necessity for him. A shield,” she says, finally meeting Hannibal’s gaze again.

“And you are afraid I will not like him because of this?” Hannibal is almost insulted, but he’s certain that Alana won’t notice.

“No, it’s--” She runs her fingers through her unstyled hair. “See, he’s a hermit. This will be his first time leaving his house for more than what is absolutely necessary in something like fifteen years. He took Beverly on a fishing trip once; he apparently only leaves his land to visit the river nearby or to take his dogs to the vet.”

Hannibal blinks. He can’t even imagine not having a social life, even a small one. Living without weekends at the theatre and his season pass to the opera sounds dreadful.

“Bev even gets his groceries for him; that’s how they met, actually. She was working with Meals On Wheels back when she was living in Virginia, and they sent her way out in the middle of nowhere. She got the wrong house, and he had to give her directions.”

“And this led to her buying his groceries?”

“It’s a long story, apparently,” says Alana, but doesn’t continue it. Hannibal imagines the curiosity will bother him until he’s able to somehow persuade it out of Beverly with free raspberry scones. “But she’s been trying to get him to meet up with us for lunch or just, I don’t know, actually *leave his house* for the past three years.”

“How were you able to get him to agree?”

“I promised to bring Applesauce over to play with his dogs.”

Hannibal grins. “An excellent arrangement for someone who prefers the company of animals. I shall endeavor to make his first foray into the wilds of my coffee shop a pleasant one.”

“I appreciate it,” Alana says, reaching across the table to grab his hand. Hannibal takes hers happily--were it another time in his life, he would’ve courted her, but intimacy with Alana, while enjoyable, has remained steadfastly platonic. Nevertheless, he leans over the table to kiss the back of her hand; Hannibal is nothing if not a gentleman.

Hannibal suspects that there is more to this mystery friend that she has yet to reveal, but Alana has returned to her coffee, so he waits patiently for the rest of the story. He hopes to not be forced to wait too long; there is only a small amount of coffee remaining in his own cup.

“I will keep my knowledge of his visit between us, of course,” says Hannibal, prompting her to continue as much as is polite. “There is no need to feel nervous for divulging this information to me.”

“I wish that was why I felt bad telling you,” she murmurs.

“Is there anyway I can help you?”

Alana looks into her empty cup. “I’m glad you think the way you do about psychics.”

Hannibal frowns, confused. “Is that what troubles you?”

“Sort of.” She lowers her voice and says, “I never told you this.”

“Of course.”

“Do you remember B1327-5?” Alana asks. “I assume you’ve heard of that case.”

Hannibal exhales heavily. “I couldn’t forget it. Simply monstrous, those studies. Completely unethical.” He can’t keep his fists from clenching, his jaw from tensing. Every psychiatrist worth their salt has read about B1327-5; it was a national scandal for a few months until, like most news, the public lost interest. “What the FBI did to that man was nothing less than torture. They kept a child locked up in a criminal psychiatric hospital, for God’s sake.”

“I’m guessing that has a lot to do with why you don’t discount the existence of inexplicable phenomena.”

“It certainly supported my beliefs, yes, regardless of the BSHCI’s concocted diagnosis and dismissal of it.” His voice raises; Hannibal can’t help it. “The media had a field day when that story came out, and rightfully so. No human should have to experience such experimentation, let alone a minor.”

Alana laces her fingers together on top of the table. “His name is Will Graham.”

Hannibal stares at her for a long time, waiting for her to go on. At last, she does.

“He’ll tell you he has an empathy disorder,” she says, “but it’s not true. There’s nothing that could possibly explain what he has beyond...well, the supernatural, because Will sees things he shouldn’t, knows things about people he couldn’t possibly know. That’s why he doesn’t leave his house; he was nervous enough to even let me come in.”

“I imagine he doesn’t leave his house for fear of being studied, as well,” says Hannibal quietly.

“You’re probably right,” says Alana, “but a lot of it is fear of eye contact. It’s how his ability manifests. Will accidentally met my eyes once and suddenly he was telling me--in first person, I might add--about how I broke my leg roller skating when I was twelve. The clothes I was wearing, the street I was on, the damn weather, Hannibal. He knew *everything*.”

Hannibal is completely dumbfounded. The articles he has read never mentioned how B1327-5’s psychic readings worked, merely the methods employed to try and evoke a response. “He has no control over what he sees?”

“It’s apparently affected by his mood,” Alana explains. “Or at least by something he is experiencing himself. Will’s leg was giving him some trouble that day.” She winces before continuing, “You know, from...the hospital.”

“Yes,” says Hannibal, remembering the sordid details of B1327-5’s confinement. “I know.” He sits back, lets his head fall to rest on the top of the chair. “I see why you were hesitant in telling me. This information is quite personal.”

“Will needs a friend, Hannibal,” Alana says gently, “someone he can really relate to. I knew if you understood who he was then...he’s a fascinating person. An absolute genius. Lonely,” she pointedly adds. “The two of you are very much alike. I think you’ll get along, if you can get him out of his shell.”

Hannibal closes his eyes. She’s right; he’s fascinated already, just from knowing who Will Graham *is*. Alana’s appealed to his curiosity, his personality, his needs. He would be annoyed at her manipulation if it wasn’t so incredibly clever.

“Tell me, Alana. Does Mr. Graham like chocolate?”

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

I am so overwhelmed with the love you all have shown this fic already! Thank you for your wonderful comments; I will answer them each as soon as I can. (I'm trying to focus on writing this fic and staying ahead of posting so I can give you two chapters a week.) You have no idea how much I appreciate your support. Simply blown away.

Thank you, fannibals. Thank you, thank you, thank you. <3

Hannibal has never slept much as an adult--a consequence of his life as an emergency room physician for many years--but he is still up far later than he is accustomed to Saturday night. The recipe that he had wanted to perfect that afternoon is still not up to his exacting standards, and it must be brought up to par immediately. Adequate is unacceptable in these circumstances.

Beyond the facade of his bedside manner, Hannibal has never truly been able to comfort others outside of feeding them, and he very much wants to comfort Will Graham.

He proofs batch after batch of dough, kneads it, fills it, braids it. Sweat drips down the back of his neck; he's probably staining his new tailored shirt, but Hannibal can't bring himself to care. The kitchen is uncomfortably hot, and his hands ache, but he keeps going.

Hannibal had always wondered what happened to B1327-5. A part of him suspected that he had committed suicide, unable to deal with his illegal incarceration. The APA's journal had printed an exclusive interview with him by some sensationalist named Freddie Lounds, but that had been immediately following his release. Hannibal's read the interview so many times that he practically has it memorized; he even keeps up with Lounds' website, hoping for more information.

To think, Will Graham has been living just an hour away from him for the past fifteen years.

He finely chops another bar of bittersweet chocolate and wonders how he will keep himself from divulging his irrational obsession to the man tomorrow. How could Will possibly understand Hannibal's strange fascination with him? Hannibal barely understands it himself, though he suspects it has much to do with his own terrible childhood. Alana is more right than she knows; he and Will share similar suffering, though Will's is certainly greater than Hannibal's own.

Hannibal's nightmares are vivid memories of the past. He can't even imagine how real Will's must be, given his peculiar gift, how much comfort and companionship he must need that he denies himself.

So he whisks, and mixes, and bakes until the birds start singing outside.

The concealer was put to good use this morning, masking the dark circles under Hannibal's eyes from having approximately two hours of sleep. Still, he looks as put-together as ever, having fretted while dressing to the point of needing to text his dearest friend, Bedelia.

H: Please be awake.

B: I am now.

H: I don't know what to wear.

B: You must be joking.

H: I'm meeting someone very important to me for the first time today. I would like to make my best impression while not being too ostentatious.

B: You realize that you are asking the impossible, yes?

H: Please advise.

B: Tell me about him.

H: How did you ascertain his gender?

B: Because you would never fuss like this over a woman, regardless of your sexuality.

H: He's a simple yet intelligent man. He likes to fish. He prefers dogs as companions.

B: Do you have waders and a leash?

H: This is not funny, Bedelia.

B: What about that suit you wore to Twelfth Night ?

H: The chocolate brown with the beige pinstripes and contrast stitching?

B: Yes.

B: With a plainer tie.

B: And a cream shirt.

H: Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

B: Good luck with your seduction, dear.

And thus, here he is, mixing chopped chocolate and homemade brown sugar and freshly-grated cinnamon, sealing it in the ropes for the hefezopf mit schokolade and popping it in the oven. He processes a fresh batch of pesto and slices a loaf of Italian bread. The menu he has planned is, he believes, exquisite yet hearty. At least, he hopes it is; Hannibal has always found it difficult not to go overboard with meals for his guests, no matter how much he tries to tailor it for their preferences.

Preferences which he does not know for Will Graham. This could very well be a disaster. Neither cooking nor baking has ever been so nerve-wracking for him.

Whisked Away opens late on Sundays, at nine instead of six. Today, however, Hannibal doesn't turn the sign over until ten, doing his best to insure that the trio will be his only customers this morning. Likewise, he intends to flip the sign back to closed as soon as they arrive. Hannibal promised Alana that he would make Will's visit as comfortable as possible, and he always keeps his promises.

Just as Alana said they would, the bell on the door rings at five past. Hannibal turns to greet them after checking on the hefezopf.

Will Graham is beautiful in the way that half chiseled sculptures are beautiful--unfinished, raw, and rough around the edges, but full of potential. His attire isn't particularly aesthetically pleasing--plain brown pants cuffed up at the bottom; a dark blue plaid shirt, several buttons undone at the top; brown leather work boots and black-rimmed glasses. But his eyes, though mostly averted to the side, are piercing: a gray blue that Hannibal knows hold a multitude of secrets. His hair frames a stubbled face in a wild mess of untamed curls.

Hannibal is broken from his reverie by Beverly, who practically bounces to the counter.

"Hey, Hannibal," she says. "You look nice today. I mean, you always do but..." Beverly smiles conspiratorially. "You look like you want to impress someone, that's all."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," and he uncharacteristically worries the string of his apron.

"You *are*!" Beverly shoves his shoulder playfully. "I bet Alana was in here yesterday," she whispers.

Hannibal glances back over to the door, where Alana is trying to coax a skittish Will toward a table. "I can neither confirm nor deny that."

"Uh-huh. Sure you can't." Beverly winks at him, and walks over to help Alana.

Finally remembering his manners, Hannibal fills three small glasses with water and takes them to the table furthest from the window. He can't decide whether to stand fully upright and confident or to make himself appear smaller. If Will is so nervous about going to a table, Hannibal is bound to complicate things further. But, at long last, Beverly and Alana each take an arm and practically drag Will over.

"Hannibal," Alana begins, "this is my good friend, Will Graham."

He's not sure if he should offer his hand to shake, so Hannibal takes a slight bow instead.
"Hello, Mr. Graham."

"You're wearing a suit," says Will, looking at Hannibal's legs. "Why are you wearing a suit?"

Hannibal has no idea why he finds him so charming. If anyone else answered a greeting like that, he'd probably excuse himself quickly, turn, and walk away. Instead, he says, "I always wear a suit when I go out."

"I've never worn one. But I don't really go out." He clears his throat, then finally says, "Hello."

Alana smiles at Hannibal, nearly as nervous as Will. "Why don't we all sit down?"

Hannibal pulls out the chairs for Alana and Beverly. He thinks to do the same for Will, but he's already plopped down in one before he can. Will stares pointedly at the centerpiece, a bright cluster of potted yellow orchids, arms folded across his chest as if he doesn't know what to do with them. His left leg bounces up and down, all of his nervous energy seemingly funneled into it.

"Do you still have that Turkish coffee?" Alana asks. "And don't worry, I can tell everyone how to drink it."

That's when Hannibal realizes that she's expecting him to keep himself to the other side of the shop. It hurts, being dismissed so suddenly. Even Beverly looks embarrassed, but Hannibal knows that Alana is very protective of her friend. Why else would she have come to warn Hannibal yesterday? So he composes his features to be as neutral as possible, nods, and leaves the table. He has coffee and food and dessert to prepare, anyway.

The Türk kahvesi comes first, but Hannibal realizes while grinding the beans in his mortar and pestle that he never asked how sweet he should make it. Walking back over to the table so soon after leaving is terribly impolite, but there's nothing to be done about it.

"I apologize for the interruption," Hannibal begins before realizing there was no conversation to be interrupted. Nevertheless, he continues, "I forgot to ask how sweet the three of you would like the coffee."

"I wondered why there weren't packets," says Will. "Just flowers. No sugar."

"The coffee and water are brewed with the sugar," Alana explains before Hannibal can.

Beverly wrinkles her nose. "Does that mean the rest of us have to take it as sweet as you do? Because I don't feel like getting cavities until the inevitable pastry shows up."

"I have more than one cesve," Hannibal says. "I am more than happy to prepare a different one for each of--"

"Can I watch?" interrupts Will, and Alana and Beverly look at him like he's suddenly grown antlers.

But Hannibal doesn't miss a beat. "Of course you can, Mr. Graham. I am always pleased to have visitors in my kitchen."

Will slides out of his chair without pushing it back from the table and walks purposefully toward the counter. He looks at the stools as if counting them, then turns to follow Hannibal's shoes with his eyes as he takes up his mortar and pestle. Wringing his fingers together, Will seems to be regretting his decision to come over and be sociable.

"It's alright if you've changed your mind," Hannibal says gently. "I won't be insulted."

"I'm...it's just..." Will sighs. "I don't know what I'm doing. I don't really like people very much. I think this is the most I've talked to someone that isn't Beverly or Alana."

"Then I'm very honored to be found interesting."

"I never said that," says Will.

Hannibal chuckles. "Then perhaps, one day, you will."

He doesn't say anything, but Will's hands fall back to his sides, and his shoulders relax from where they've been holding up his ears. After standing for a few minutes and watching Hannibal finish grinding the beans and dividing them into each cseve, he returns to the table.

Hannibal's beyond surprised when Will shows back up at his elbow while he's pouring the coffee into fincans. "Do you want me to take that over?"

He stops himself from looking up at Will at the last second, concentrates instead on placing each cup on a brightly-colored saucer. "You're a guest, Mr. Graham," says Hannibal. "I am happy to serve you."

"Just Will. Please. And I wanted to be polite is all," Will tells him, and Hannibal is powerless to keep himself from grinning widely. Alana has completely misread her friend; even if all Will has done is practiced sociability, even though he is blunt and conversationally graceless, he tries. That's more than Hannibal can say for most people who interact with the outside world on a daily basis.

"I appreciate that greatly, Will," Hannibal replies. "You are too kind." So he shows Will which coffee is which, and desperately fails to not watch him take them back to the table.

He's never been more grateful for the manners which keep his beast in check. Hannibal didn't expect to be so taken with the man so quickly, but he has never ached to touch someone like this, or to feed and take care of them--Will is skinny, albeit muscular. It's been years since he felt so awkward and nervous; Hannibal cannot misstep. He must have Will Graham. Leaving him to his own lonely devices is simply unacceptable.

Luckily, he has cooking to distract himself with. Hannibal browns and crisps pancetta in the oven. He cooks the eggs carefully, pushing the sides in toward the center again and again, leaving the top wet and slightly uncooked. The pesto is stirred in gently while he toasts the Italian bread. After dividing the eggs between three pieces, Hannibal balances the plates on

his arm, carrying the small pan of pancetta in his other hand. Tableside garnishing isn't something he gets to do often; besides dressing, it's the only real place where a non-actor can get away with being theatrical.

Will doesn't seem especially impressed, but Hannibal tries to take it in stride. He wishes them good eating, and excuses himself once more, this time to remove the hefezopf from the oven. Hannibal lets it cool, and begins washing up.

"Everything's really good," Will says behind him, and Hannibal's so startled that he forgets himself, turning around and catching Will with his head raised.

Their eyes meet. Hannibal feels like he's sinking, being drawn inexorably into them like a whirlpool. He never wants to stop looking; in fact, Hannibal's completely incapable of physically turning away. There's an odd force keeping him glued to the spot. He can't move his head, even when Will's eyes flutter closed.

"I've never made this before," begins Will in Hannibal's own voice. "It seems strange, to eat a bird whole, to drown it in Armagnac, to watch it die, wings flapping in the alcohol futilely. But life is cruel; I know this too well, and so I watch, to honor it, like a wise hunter consumes and uses every part of a wild animal. I am a beast, too, to take such enjoyment in this. There is nothing polite about it, and that knowledge frees me. I imagine setting the trap for it myself as it quickly roasts in the oven, imagine a life as a pack hunter, imagine letting myself roam as I have always longed to.

"I can't even wait to take it to the table, just let the ortolan cool and pop it into my mouth whole. It tastes like hazelnuts and figs, gamey and fatty and salty and perfect. I have never felt more alive. The experience is nearly orgasmic."

The bond breaks, and Hannibal staggers back, nearly putting his hands on the still-hot stove. He's panting like he's just run a marathon, trembling like he's recovering from an ecstatic experience with the ineffable. It's intoxicating, and terrifying, being read like that, being *seen*.

Will opens his eyes. Embarrassed tears run down his face, and Hannibal wants to catch them with his fingers, kiss them away. His hands are shaking where they lie on the counter, and Hannibal wants to hold them, kiss them, too. Nothing could have prepared him for feeling so connected with another person.

"I'm sorry," says Will, and runs for the door and out onto the sidewalk.

"Shit," Beverly swears from across the room. "I'll go after him," and she does, following Will at almost the same speed.

Hannibal sighs and hides his face in his hands. "Alana, I didn't mean to--it was an accident." It's like Will's own emotions are still echoing in his head; if he knew where his soul was, Hannibal is sure it would hurt. He's dizzy, but Alana is there to steady him before he falls.

"It's okay," she assures him. "That's how it happened to me, too. Will's so quiet, you don't even know he's behind you until...well, until he is."

“I promised you I would make him comfortable.”

“And you *did*, Hannibal. When he read me, I literally ran out the door, got in my car, and left. You were positively stoic. I doubt he’ll be as inconsolable as he was when it happened with me.”

Hannibal finally takes his hands away from his face. “Allow me to pack everything to take with you.”

“Oh, that’s not necessary.”

“I insist,” he says, already reaching for paper boxes and a handled bag from the shelf. “It’s obvious he doesn’t eat well. Make sure he takes this with him.” Hannibal looks back at Alana and adds. “Please.”

“Okay,” says Alana. “I will, even if I have to sneak it into his house.”

“Actually, would you mind boxing up the food on the table?”

“Sure, no problem.”

She walks away, and Hannibal pulls a business card out of the holder next to the register, and selects his nicest pen from the cup. He flips the card over.

Forgive me, he writes, and then places it under the twine when he wraps up the hefezopf.

Bag in hand, Alana gives him a sad wave as she walks out the door. Hannibal sinks to the floor behind the counter.

He’s in love with Will Graham, a man he’s just met but knows intimately, and he’s never going to see him again.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Oh my gosh. You all are amazing. I'm working through answering your wonderful, wonderful comments. There's much blushing over here on my end! Thank you for your support. So incredibly humbling and validating. <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The following day, Hannibal does something he's never done before--he cancels his regular weekend outing with Bedelia.

H: I regret to inform you that I will be unable to keep our engagement this Saturday.

B: I take it your meeting yesterday went well and you're taking your paramour instead?

H: No.

H: It was a complete disaster.

H: I ruined everything.

B: You seem

B: More emotional than usual.

B: Excellent aria emotional, even.

B: What did you do, Hannibal?

H: I looked at him.

B: What?

H: The issue is rather complex.

B: Will you stop being such a mysterious diva and just call me?

Bedelia picks up after the first ring.

"B1327-5," he says, forgoing a greeting.

"Oh." Bedelia audibly exhales; being a fellow psychiatrist, she needs no further explanation.

"How on earth did you find him?"

“He happened to be the friend of a friend.”

“Did he...?”

“It was incredible,” Hannibal tells her. “Indescribable. Agonizing.”

He hears the unmistakable clink of glass on glass. “Tell me.”

“I looked at him,” he repeats, “and it was captivating, in every sense of the obsolete definition. He has no control over it whatsoever; if you meet his eyes, he sees a memory. Miss Bloom posits that the selection has something to do with whatever emotional state he is in at that exact moment, but I haven’t been able to test that theory. Regardless, I was in thrall to him. He spoke with my voice, saw and tasted and heard and experienced exactly as I had.”

“I’m guessing, then, that he typically refrains from eye contact,” says Bedelia. “To protect himself, as well as others.” Hannibal hears her take a sip of wine, swallowing too quickly to have savored. “You shouldn’t have forced it.”

“An accident, nothing more.”

Bedelia laughs. “No, it wasn’t. Your id simply decided to take what it wanted. You desired his sight.” She pauses, then adds, “And he saw you, didn’t he? Saw through your person suit?”

Hannibal closes his eyes, reconstructing the moment. “Yes,” he says breathily.

“You do realize that Beauty is to love the Beast first, not the other way around?”

“It doesn’t particularly matter,” says Hannibal. “I doubt he will seek me out again.”

“Who are we to question Fate?” Bedelia asks him. “If you felt a deeper link with him than you have with others, then I imagine it not only to be shared, but also simply a matter of time before the two of you again meet. Besides, sometimes to forgive another, we must first forgive ourselves.”

“He did nothing wrong.”

“But he *thinks* that he did, just as you think that *you* did. Belief is the blood of the world, after all; as one is thicker than water, the other is stronger than truth.”

Hannibal considers this, long past their conversation, and well into the night.

Alana finally returns for lunch on Thursday, and Hannibal is elated, though he conceals it.

“I feared you would not come back,” he admits, turning his back to pop an English muffin into the oven to toast.

“I’ve driven out to Wolf Trap the past few days,” Alana says, settling onto the stool and placing her satchel on the one to her right.

“Wolf Trap?”

“To check on Will,” she explains. “He lives in this gorgeous farmhouse out there.”

Hannibal is glad that Alana can’t see his face as he pulls organic cream cheese and fresh pesto from the refrigerator. His eyes are tearing up. This overwhelming emotion he feels at the mere mention of Will’s name is unexpected. He feels childish like he never has before; it’s disconcerting.

“Anyway, he wouldn’t open the door, but we did have lunch on either side of it. He’s being very maudlin about the whole thing.”

He tenses his jaw. “I think that is understandable, considering the circumstances. I’ve been somewhat maudlin, myself.” Hannibal finally finds the mixing bowl he’s looking for, and begins blending the pesto and cream cheese.

“I doubt you take to the whiskey like he does, though,” says Alana.

“I must confess to drinking an extra glass of wine before bed most nights this week.” Hannibal hesitates, not wanting to admit too much. “Perhaps two on Sunday.”

“Hannibal?”

He clears his throat. “Yes?”

“You like him, don’t you? More than academically.”

The hunt for a perfect coffee cup at the other end of the counter becomes extremely important. Hannibal can sense Alana’s smug smile. He would probably feel it prickle the hairs on his back halfway across the world.

“It’s not my place to say,” begins Alana, “but I’m fairly certain that the feeling’s mutual.”

“Nonsense,” Hannibal says, as much to himself as to her.

“Why?”

He doesn’t know how to explain it to her, though. The deck is already stacked unfairly against Will. He knows nothing about Hannibal, while Hannibal knows entirely too much about him. Even admitting that he’s studied Will’s past extensively would send the poor man running. Again.

“You might as well be Baltimore’s most eligible bachelor, Hannibal.”

“He said he didn’t find me interesting,” Hannibal says, setting her usual espresso in front of her perhaps a bit more forcefully than usual.

Alana rolls her eyes. “Will doesn’t find *anyone* interesting. He doesn’t connect with other people. It’s his nature.”

“You mean his conditioning,” Hannibal corrects her. “The nature that was forced upon him.”

“Well whatever the reason, Will typically doesn’t,” says Alana, trying to veer the conversation back to pleasant territory. “But he keeps mentioning you. I don’t know what memory he found in your head on Saturday--Beverly and I couldn’t hear, which is probably good for you--but whatever it was stuck with him.”

He’s having to bite his tongue to keep from telling her everything--how connected they’d been, pushed together by an unseen hand, blending, melding, *becoming*. In the days since Will’s reading of him, Hannibal has thought more about the possibility of that same wildness being mirrored in Will. If perhaps neither of them are as alone in the world as they’ve always thought. He wants to ask Alana to try and find out if his assumption is correct.

But that isn’t her story to tell, just as his experience with Will isn’t *his* story to tell, either. Hannibal has suddenly developed a terrible case of morals; combined with his personal ethics, he hardly recognizes himself. Being ruled by his emotions, even though he maintains the ability to hide it, is unusual. Even worse, Hannibal’s not sure that he minds the change.

Alana puts her head down on her arms on the counter and giggles as the English muffin burns in the oven, Hannibal never noticing.

u got it, u got it bad

when you’re on the phone

hang up and you call right back

“You have exactly one second to turn that off, Miss Katz,” Hannibal says flatly as he nearly chops off the tip of his thumb.

Behind him, Beverly laughs, but mercifully turns off her music. “Sorry,” she says, “thought my headphones were still in.”

Hannibal sighs. “Of course you did.”

She hoists herself onto the stool, the polyester of her running shorts squeaking on the leather. It’s unusual for Beverly to stop in on Saturdays, especially when she’s training, but it saves Hannibal from his own thoughts.

“Alana told me you’ve been in a lovesick funk.”

Hannibal puts down his knife. He really shouldn’t be armed right now. “I disagree entirely.”

Beverly smirks and says, “Of course you do.”

“I’m merely worried about Will,” says Hannibal. “Alana said he wouldn’t even allow her in.”

“That’s just Will,” Beverly tells him, shrugging. “He’s an odd duck. Sometimes he needs...I dunno, space to recover in. Sunday was pretty hard for him.”

“I had meant to make it a pleasant experience. I feel that I failed to be a good host.”

“And he feels like he failed to be a good guest,” says Beverly. “He dug into your head uninvited. But trust me, he was going to need some time to decompress after being so far out of his comfort zone, anyway.”

Hannibal turns, setting her usual down in front of her--a tiny pot of hot water, her favorite teacup, and a basket filled full of loose leaf Lung-Ching. “Taking time to meditate and reflect is healthy for anyone.”

She starts to steep her tea immediately. “Will doesn’t so much meditate as he does hole up with his wolfpack and marinate himself in Ardbeg Ten.”

“Alana said something to the same effect.” He bends to pull a raspberry scone out of the case, takes a moment to consider, and then removes another.

“Oh gosh, Hannibal,” Beverly says, “you’re going to make me fat.”

“I highly doubt that,” replies Hannibal, slipping the scones in the oven to warm. “You know,” he begins, “Alana also told me that you and Will had a very strange first meeting.”

Beverly groans. “You don’t know the half of it. What all did she tell you?”

“That he had to give you directions while on an excursion with Meals On Wheels.”

“So this little old lady lives out in the middle of Bumfuck, Virginia, right?” Beverly says, launching into the story enthusiastically. “This whole area is just scattered houses in the middle of huge fields surrounded by, like, woods out of a Grimm fairytale.”

“That sounds lovely,” and it honestly does. Hannibal can’t picture Will living anywhere else, though he can’t pin down the reason why.

“It’s nice,” she agrees, “if you don’t want to run into anybody or happen to own seventeen dogs.”

Hannibal blinks. “Seventeen?”

“I don’t know, it seems like he never has the same number.” She lifts the basket out of her tea just as Hannibal produces a second saucer for her to lay it on. “Anyway, here I am, nearly an

hour into this misadventure with Mrs. O'Malley's hot meals rapidly becoming frozen dinners in my backseat. I finally run into this beautiful old house--first house I've seen since I left the main road--and I think, 'Thank God, finally.'"

Beverly stops to take a sip of her tea, so Hannibal takes the opportunity to retrieve the scones from the oven and plate them properly. He's still stuck picturing Will running at the head of a pack of wolves, confident, sure-footed, graceful. Hannibal can see it so clearly in his mind; it must be a reality somewhere, if not here. He hopes it's here.

"So I pull in front of the garage," she continues, "open the door, and there's suddenly five dogs of various shapes and sizes running at me, barking their fuzzy heads off. I have no idea how I'm going to get out of the car without getting clobbered, right? Let alone get the pot pies and inevitable casseroles out of the back. And then, basically out of *nowhere*, appears Will, bundled up in this big green coat with enough pockets to make a woman jealous, practically hiding underneath his knitted cap. And Hannibal, he whistles, once-- *once*," she repeats, leaning in to make sure he understands the gravity of her words, "and every single one of those dogs sits down and stops barking. It was like...I dunno, the goddamn dog whisperer or something."

Hannibal might be having a little difficulty breathing. He *does* run with them; he has to. Timid Will Graham is, in actuality, the recognized alpha of a herd of beasts. There's something dark and wild lurking within him, the same as with Hannibal.

He's never believed in soulmates before now--even as a romantic, it was too farfetched a concept for him--but Will's creating new truths in Hannibal's world left and right, it would seem.

"Please," Hannibal says, putting the scones in front of Beverly, "do continue."

"I ask him if he lives with a Mrs. O'Malley, and he says no, but she lives about twenty minutes north of him. Gives me directions, I thank him, and that's that. He bends and pets his dogs during the whole conversation, but I just chalked it up to him being a dog guy. But *then*, when I get to the old lady's house and tell her why I was late and how I found her...Hannibal, I had to practically force that food on her." Beverly stops to take a bite of scone.

"Why?"

She swallows, takes another bite, and continues talking with her hand in front of her mouth. "She was crossing herself, I swear to God. Said he wanders around at night like the dead, that he's possessed, all kinds of crap. So I'm thinking, 'I've gotta go back and find out what this is all about.'"

Hannibal is somewhere between riveted by the story and possessively angry at Will's neighbors.

"I take him some brownies the next weekend," says Beverly, "to say thank you--"

"And to spy on him."

She has the decency to look sheepish. “Yeah, that too. But he answers the door and I give him the brownies and Winston--that’s one of his dogs--looks up at me with these big, soulful eyes, and I don’t even think about it, just crouch down to pet him. I glance back up at Will, and suddenly he’s telling me about the first slumber party I went to in the second grade.”

Hannibal leans back against the sink. “How did that make you feel?”

“Scared,” Beverly admits, “but it was also the coolest thing that had ever happened to me. I mean, a real life psychic! You don’t run into people like that outside of cable TV. But he gets upset and slams the door in my face, and I can hear him crying inside, so I stay and talk with him through the door.” She pops the last bite of the first scone in her mouth, nonchalant as if her story is normal and that she isn’t something of a saint.

“That was very kind of you to do,” says Hannibal, keeping his voice low and steady though his heart is breaking a little.

“I get him calmed down, and tell him I’ll come back to check on him the next weekend. And he asks me if I might do him a favor and bring a big bag of dog food with me, because he’s not sure he’ll be able to make it to the store after getting so upset.” Beverly takes an enormous bite of the second scone. “After that,” she says, behind her hand again, “it became a regular thing, me bringing him his groceries so he didn’t have to risk reading people.”

“What does he like to eat?”

Beverly laughs, and a few stray crumbs fly from her mouth before she can stop them. “You would ask that, but you’re not going to like the answer.”

Hannibal frowns. “Why is that?”

“It’s cheap food. Ramen, boxed mac and cheese, corn flakes, peanut butter and white bread, bananas, store-brand Kraft singles, cans of tomato soup. Occasionally he asks me to pick up a package of those little lemon creme cookies? The kind your grandma always hid in her pocket along with Kleenex and wrapped peppermints.”

“That would explain why he’s so thin,” says Hannibal, trying his best not to look completely, totally disgusted. “And I can’t picture my grandmother doing that, either.”

“You know,” says Beverly, “I’ll be running to the store for him after this. If you want to come with.”

Hannibal, to his own surprise, actually considers it. That is, until he realizes it would involve being an accomplice to the purchase of horrible not-quite food

But it doesn’t mean he can’t send something along.

“Lemon cookies, you said?”

Hannibal considers not opening Whisked Away on Sunday morning, having slept restlessly the night before, plagued by visions of a feral Will racing through the woods on all fours, smiling manically, teeth full of blood. Sometimes, Hannibal joined him, only upright, letting Will chase him and catch him and take him down like prey, both of them happy, content. In other dreams, they fought, clashed, striking and maiming each other only to retire and lick their mate's wounds.

That word send chills down Hannibal's spine more than any nightmare ever has. *Mate*.

Still, after every dream, he woke up hard, or else cock already in hand. And it felt lecherous and wrong to get off to wicked fantasies of a man he only knows through the words of cold science and a handful of exchanged sentences, but it didn't stop him. Hannibal could still smell the woods, smell the blood, smell *Will*. Denying the urges of his physical body, still clinging to dreams, was impossible.

He's very glad to have a quiet shop today, and will be just as happy to close obscenely early. Hannibal puts on Glenn Gould's rendition of the *Goldberg Variations* and sets in for a few hours of recipe creation. When the bell on the door rings, he almost sighs and says something rude, craving solitude of his own.

"Hello, Hannibal."

Hannibal doesn't dare look up any farther than his visitor's knees for fear of startling him, but he longs to, wants to immerse himself in those eyes again. Perhaps another time, when he has been deemed more interesting.

Instead, he smiles fondly. "Hello, Will," he says. "It's good to see you."

Chapter End Notes

Yes, pesto cream cheese is a thing that exists. There was a super-hipster coffee shop near the campus of my first college (and *there's* another long story) that was owned and operated by this cute tiny punk lady. Anyway, they had the best selection of ridiculous bagel toppings, and I ate pesto cream cheese bagels *constantly*. So, if you get the chance, try the fuck out of that.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I don't even know what to say. Your love for this is incredible. I am truly hashtag blessed. <3

Will Graham cleaned up well for his first visit the previous week. As far as Hannibal's concerned, however, he's just as gorgeous now in his faded, worn out jeans and sneakers that have seen infinitely better days. He's still wearing flannel, but now it's open and untucked, showing off a plain white t-shirt. Well, it *would* be plain white if it wasn't so obviously old, tiny holes peppering around the collar. His curls are plastered to his forehead, like he's been out in the sun all day.

And that's a line of thought Hannibal has to put a stop to immediately.

He clears his sketch pad and pens from the counter just as Will sits down in front of him. Will brings his hands up to rest on the counter; there's grease under his nails and worked into the calluses on his fingers. He rubs his pointer fingers with his thumbs, an obvious nervous habit.

Hannibal's mouth twitches into a smile. "You don't need to be nervous here, not with me. We're friends."

Will stops rubbing his fingers immediately and moves them back beneath the counter. He nods his head toward where Hannibal's stowed his paper and pens. "You draw?"

"Often," says Hannibal. He leans back against the sink to give Will more space. "I find it relaxing. Drawing helps me maintain memories of favorite places, loved ones. I also like to challenge myself and recreate art I've seen in museums."

"Wow. I don't..." Will huffs out a laugh. "I have no idea what to say to that."

"It's a hobby, like any other." A pause, and then, "What do you do in your spare time?"

Will drums his fingers against the underside of the counter. "All my time is spare time."

"So is mine."

"Really?" asks Will. "I think we're sitting in evidence otherwise."

"Another hobby," Hannibal explains. "I enjoy time spent in the kitchen. It's extremely fulfilling, nourishing others."

He watches Will's torso twist as he looks around at the empty cafe. Will's shirt pulls at his chest, but Hannibal can't help but notice how loose it is in the stomach. Hannibal does his best not to consider whether Will simply grew used to eating inferior food in the hospital, or if they withheld meals, or if he has a poor self image now. But it's both the physician and psychiatrist in him that make the thoughts flash through his mind all the same.

"Are you hungry, Will?"

Will pulls his flannel shirt across his stomach, fabric bunched in his fists, arms crossed tightly. "I don't really eat breakfast." He clears his throat and adds, "Did finish that egg sandwich you made last week, though, for breakfast the day after. Asked Bev to bring eggs with my groceries but forgot everything that went with it. Didn't taste right." More quietly, Will says, "And I ate that chocolate bread you sent, too."

Hannibal's inexplicably proud. "I'm glad you enjoyed it."

"That's why, you know."

"Why what?"

Will shrugs, still clutching his shirt, like he's a frightened dog with his hackles raised, on guard. "Why I drove out. Wanted to thank you."

"You're more than welcome." Hannibal turns and pulls his tin of coffee from the shelf. "How about some caffeine? If you won't let me fix you anything else."

Will chuckles. "You make it sound like I'm denying you...don't know, a pony for your birthday or something."

Hannibal looks for his mortar and pestle; apparently, in his distress last weekend, he didn't put it back where it belonged. It's a bit distressing *now*, because he never does that. Ever. He's fastidious to a fault--"Fussy," says the Bedelia in his head.

"Those, um." Hannibal hears Will's fingers drumming under the counter again. "Those cookies were good, too."

"So you like sweets?"

"Who doesn't?"

"An excellent question," Hannibal says, turning his head to look at Will's hands. His fingers stop drumming, and he goes back to rubbing them with his thumbs, down the sides and up again, a repeating pattern. "Still nervous?"

"Kinda, yeah."

Hannibal finally locates the mortar and pestle where it's wedged into his spice rack. Not completely out of place, he supposes. At least in a predictable location. He considers his words carefully, now nervous himself. "What made you nervous?" Hannibal asks, resorting to psychiatrist mode as easy as piloting an automatic car.

Will sighs. “The food question,” he admits. “Wasn’t really fed enough, you know. When I was younger. Just...got used to it, I guess.”

Hannibal closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. Disordered eating as a result of trauma and conditioning. Comforting Will Graham just became more difficult, but Hannibal has never backed down from a compelling challenge. He’s invested now--personally so.

“I understand that.”

“Oh really?” Will snorts, disbelieving.

“Yes,” says Hannibal, now rummaging for his utensils for preparing Türk kahvesi. How absent-minded has he been the past week? “I spent a portion of my childhood in an area occupied by militant forces. I know what it is like to go hungry, Will. I assure you.”

Will is quiet for a long time, long enough for Hannibal to find his copper box of tools in the bread bin, which is simply ridiculous. Hannibal turns around to grind the beans, focusing more intently on the coffee’s transformation into a fine powder than he has in years.

“I’m sorry,” Will says, once he’s found his voice again.

Hannibal looks up and past Will’s elbow. “It’s alright, Will. Often, when we have been through a traumatic event, it is difficult to imagine anyone else experiencing something similar. Or, at least, having a familiar feeling.”

“Yeah, guess so.”

“Would you turn the sign and lock the door for me, please?” Hannibal is glad he forgot to earlier, giving him an easy way to turn the conversation. Though it is yet another thing he’s managed to forget recently, and he knows it isn’t his age.

“If you’re closing,” says Will, “I can go ahead and go. I just needed to say thanks for feeding me. Don’t want to be a bother.”

Hannibal bites the inside of his cheek to stop himself from grinning. “Nonsense,” he says, recovering quickly. “I was planning on closing early, yes, but I would be very grateful for the company.” He turns his head, looking at the wall instead of over his shoulder at Will. “Your company, in particular.”

“Me?” Will asks, getting off the stool and making his way to the door. Hannibal hears the thunk of the sign against the glass and the click of the lock. “I’m nothing special, I promise.”

“If you say so.”

Will invites himself behind the counter, leans against it from the opposite side, and shoves his hands in his pockets. “Why the early closing?”

“I haven’t slept well as of late,” Hannibal tells him.

Will hums in agreement. “Know how that goes.”

“Your sleep is poor?” He makes sure to keep his focus on the cezve.

“Always,” says Will. “Night terrors. I wake up drenched with sweat, or else ten miles away from my house in my underwear.” Hannibal hears him wipe his nose with his sleeve, snorting slightly; it’s the first disgusting thing he’s found about Will, save his dietary choices, but those are hardly his fault. “I’m not sure why I’m telling you all this.”

“If it helps, we could exchange secrets,” Hannibal offers. “A quid pro quo, if you will.”

“Alright. Tell me about...something similar, I guess. About your own sleep.”

“Once,” he begins, “while I was in residency, I needed to rest between two eighteen-hour shifts. I only had time for a short nap; it made no sense to go home, and I couldn’t find a sufficiently-silent spot.”

“What did you do?”

“I went down to the morgue, pulled out an empty drawer from the cooler, and slept there.”

“...I can’t decide if that’s creepy or ingenious.”

Hannibal removes the copper pot from the stove just before it boils. “Hmm. I seem to have left the fincans on the shelf.”

“The what now?”

“The little copper cups I served the coffee in last week. Or rather, that *you* served,” Hannibal amends, a fragment of amusement breaking through his mask.

Will searches the shelves, but doesn’t touch anything, merely scans until he finds them. He finds a cloth napkin and uses it to cover his thumb and fingers before removing them, grabbing the saucers while he’s there. “Thank you for that, by the way.”

“For what?” asks Hannibal, puzzled. He glances over at Will’s hands; he’s surprised to find that he enjoys looking at them nearly as much as his eyes.

“Letting me be helpful,” Will explains. “I don’t really get much opportunity, living sequestered like a monk.” Setting the cups and saucers down next to Hannibal. “And thank you for not looking me in the face. It’s...refreshing, not to have to watch myself so much. Beverly and Alana don’t really think to do it, so I’m always the one averting my eyes. I don’t get to see faces very often.”

Hannibal pours the coffee. “That must be very difficult for you.”

“I got used to seeing people’s knees and feet a long time ago. Besides, I practically have a doctorate in shoe brand identification now.”

“How useful is that?” Hannibal asks, smirking.

“Not very. I prefer looking at faces to feet.” His hand inches into Hannibal’s field of vision. If he wanted, he could excuse the movement as simply reaching for a coffee. At least, until he adds, “Yours is nice. Your face, I mean. It’s...nice.”

“Thank you for saying so,” because Will’s obvious inexperience with flirting is oddly charming. Hannibal pushes a coffee toward Will, tries not to think about what other sort of inexperience Will might have, or if he would make up for it with raw brutality. “Would you join me at a table?” When Will doesn’t respond, only runs a finger along the edge of the bone white saucer, leaving a barely-there smear of grease, Hannibal takes the Beverly approach and attempts to bribe him. “I think I may have a few lemon sablés left in the case, if you’re interested.”

Will taps his finger against the saucer twice, then says, “Can we stay over here? It’s...”

It takes all of Hannibal’s restraint not to close the scant inches of distance between their hands. “Will?”

“You seem...at ease here. In your kitchen. And I can watch you without accidentally...well. Looking.” Will withdraws his hand. “You haven’t said anything yet.”

“About?”

“You know what about,” Will says sharply, and then sighs heavily. “Sorry. I just need to know where we stand. You’ve not asked about it, and you seemed pretty freaked when I left last week.”

Hannibal takes the fincan and forgoes the saucer. Looking into it, he can’t help but wonder what fortune the grounds at the bottom hold. “It was exhilarating.”

“Most people are bothered by it. Actually,” he says, “‘bothered’ isn’t even close to a strong enough word. The typical reaction is either punching me, running away, or looking at me like my head’s about to spin and I’m going to spew pea soup.”

“I have always been exceptionally open-minded about unconventional experiences.” Hannibal’s used to only telling as much of the truth as people want to hear, but he’s not ready to broach the topic of his conversation with Alana just yet, let alone delve into his decade and a half of scouring journal after psychological journal for information about Will.

But he seems to be ready to divulge parts of himself, whether Hannibal is able to fully participate in the discourse or not. “Have you ever heard of the baku?”

Hannibal takes a sip of his coffee, but doesn’t savor it as slowly as he typically does. “The Japanese talismanic devourer of nightmares, though some believe that the baku, being ravenous, will take every dream it finds, both good and bad.”

It’s difficult, having to imagine Will’s facial reactions, reconstructing them in his brain based on the sole time Hannibal’s seen his features. He can barely remember his face--nothing but Will’s eyes, burned into his retinas, haunting him every time he closes his own. Hannibal

wonders if it's like this for each of the people Will has read over the course of his life, or if this is unique to him. Obviously, he hopes for the latter.

The Will in his mind's eyebrows raise in surprise, a sardonic half-smile on his face. But his mouth is still wide, showing his teeth, like a hyena preparing to strike. "Figures you'd know," Will says. "You seem to know everything."

"I assure you, I don't," replies Hannibal. "I do, however, have a very good eye for detail, as well as an excellent memory."

"Speaking of memory." Will finally reaches for his coffee; he mirrors Hannibal, and takes only the fincan. "Obviously, I don't eat dreams."

"You don't precisely seem to eat," Hannibal notes before taking a longer sip.

"Touché. But the baku are the closest analog I've ever found." He laughs sardonically. "A fellow chimera, you know? Like the dream-eaters, I can't control what I find, if it will be pleasant or not. I do like to think that some of the horrors I accidentally dredge up out of people's heads helps them process, deal with guilt, that sort of thing. Probably not," says Will, "but I can convince myself of it easily enough."

"And what about you?" asks Hannibal. "Does it help you to process, as well?"

Will drinks deeply before answering, hissing like he's burned his tongue. "How'd you know I drank my coffee black?"

Hannibal dares to glance over, seemingly to look at Will's hands, but his gaze drifts higher. His throat is lovely and long, Adam's apple pronounced. This view is committed to his slowly growing collection of the pieces of Will Graham, too. He anticipates sketching it later, though perhaps with the head tilted back to show the strong corded muscles that lie undisturbed beneath his skin. Someday, if he has anything to say about it, Hannibal will trace them with his fingertips.

"Hannibal?"

"My apologies," he says. "I was lost in thought. But, to answer your question, it was a mere process of elimination."

"How's that?"

"Alana is a good friend, and I know she takes her coffee unbearably sweet. Beverly hardly ever takes coffee, preferring tea, but she did not seem averse to having her coffee brewed with a small amount of sugar. And you asked where the packets were if not on the table, which means that, if you were to take it sweet, you would prefer to do so yourself."

"Are you sure you don't share my curse?" Will asks, and Hannibal can tell he's amused by the way his jaw shifts downward as his mouth curves up, the way the shadow lengthens over his throat.

"Simply attentive, as I said."

They finish their coffee in relative silence, listening as Glenn Gould begins his melodic original rendition of the *Goldberg Variations* all over again.

“Bach?” Will asks, setting his empty fincan down beside the saucer.

Hannibal nods, inordinately pleased. “You have an excellent ear. You know the piece?”

“Not especially, but someone I read once did.” Will folds his arms back over his chest, gripping his arms as if to keep away some unearthly chill. “This version, too. She would sit and listen to it in the library on the record player for hours, taking notes, nitpicking, finding reasons to hate it.”

“Why?”

Will looks back over at Hannibal; he can feel Will taking apart his double Windsor with his eyes. “Because everyone else loved it.”

“Do you often keep the stolen moments you’ve consumed?” Having distracted him with the personal nature of the question--a necessary rudeness, and quite forgivable--Hannibal turns away and sets down his fincan next to the register. He slides open the door to the case to look for the lemon sablés.

“They rattle around in my skull forever,” Will tells him. “I relive them frequently, to the point that I blur into them. My life is a collection of other people’s lives.”

Hannibal rescues the remaining two sablés from the tray with the madeleines and meringues. “Another reason you prefer your own company,” he says, and his voice echoes slightly within the confines of the glass. “It allows you to sort out which story belongs to whom.”

“It doesn’t hurt that dogs are easier to understand than humans.”

“Beverly tells me you have built quite the pack for yourself.” He stands again, sablés wrapped in the same napkin he used to grab them. “I believe she said seventeen,” Hannibal says, opening his hand to offer the cookies to Will, making sure to keep his own gaze on said cookies.

As Hannibal had suspected, Will doesn’t turn them down; his fingers hover, then linger, then curl into a loose fist. From this close, Hannibal can see that Will’s hands are actually clean, merely stained. His nails are neatly trimmed, his fingers slim, the distal joints defined by deep lines.

“Only seven,” and Hannibal’s sure that he’s rolling his eyes. “And you’re trying to trick me into eating both of those without thinking,” Will says, “I’m sure of it.”

“If I were trying to trick you, then I would tell you of little Abigail who comes in after school on Wednesdays with her mother, who always tells her to pick two.”

“And why is that?”

“So that one hand is not jealous of the other.”

Will acquiesces, and takes both.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Sweet Mary, mother of Josh. My inability to word continues. Please know that I am immensely grateful. <3

It took less than an hour for Will to begin feeling agitated, though he and Hannibal mostly stood in companionable silence. Hannibal and Will stayed in the tidy little kitchen behind the counter--"I feel safer here," Will said.

"Why is that?" Hannibal asked.

"It's smaller than the rest of the place. The counter is like..." He paused, constructing the rest of his thoughts. "It's like being in a trench. The war's out there, but I'm in here."

"So long as there are no grenades," Hannibal said, and Will laughed.

"I suppose you're right."

Hannibal had taken out his paper and pen again and returned to diagramming recipes, mostly of the lemon-flavored variety. He had been tempted to draw Will in secret, his subject content to have his head up for a change, to be able to look around freely at his new surroundings. Will had been so at ease, relaxed and soft. Instead, Hannibal had taken the opportunity to surreptitiously push various confections in Will's direction, watching him idly munch and make happy little noises.

When Will left, he threw a tiny wave goodbye over his shoulder, and Hannibal thought his heart would burst. He comforted him, if only for a short time; he fed him, though only sweets, but Hannibal didn't much mind. The time would come when he and Will would sit and dine together, he is sure of it.

Closing up the shop takes longer than usual, mostly because Hannibal is, for the first time in many years, daydreaming. Even as a young man, he'd never considered the existence of a person he could spend the rest of his life with, but Will is such an ideal partner. Hannibal can't help himself. Every time he boxed up a cookie or pastry, Hannibal imagined Will tasting it.

Eventually, he has to take a break from his closing duties. Hannibal is aware, of course, that food can be erotic, but the act of feeding someone has never been so pleasurable to him. It has never affected him like this before. But the idea of Will, perhaps sitting in his lap so as to turn his eyes away, nibbling on treats Hannibal had made for him...

Perhaps if Will took better care of himself, if he fed himself properly, this would not be the case. Hannibal wouldn't be turned on by the simple notion of expanding Will's palate. But he could so clearly picture his lips; Hannibal's eyes focused on them so often today as to memorize every aspect: the precise cupid's bow of the top lip, how pink it would become once Will is healthier; his bottom lip, thin and ripe for biting and sucking on until swollen.

The most exquisite product of Hannibal's imagination however, is the way Will's lips would look with his mouth open. With something flat and thin, like a wafer, his lips would barely part, provide just a hint of tongue. For a more substantial bite of a food, perhaps a forkful of pasta or a taste of kalua-roast pork loin, Will would open his mouth wider, showcase the edge of his teeth. Hannibal thinks immediately of his dream and watching Will tear into prey, blood trickling down his chin, waiting to be kissed and licked away like an errant drip of sauce.

And then Hannibal remembers the memory Will ate from his mind, considers the stretched oval of Will's lips as he consumes the ortolan himself, bones crunching between powerful jaws, eyes closed in bliss and enjoyment, and now Hannibal can gaze at his beautiful face in its entirety--

Will would look the same on his knees, face slack and eyelids smooth, letting Hannibal push into his mouth, down further into his throat, drawing in Hannibal's cock the way he's drawn in his mind, siphoning the life from him and keeping it the same as his memories.

Hannibal clutches the edge of the counter, bracing himself as he shudders. Windows unshaded at his back, he unzips quickly and pulls his cock free from the fly of his briefs. It's crude and not his usual style, but Hannibal spits into his hand anyway, wraps it around himself in a loose fist and begins to slide it up and down. He alternates the pressure of his fingers, undulating them, all the while pretending that it's Will's throat, swallowing closed around the glans as Hannibal's foreskin pulls back and rubs against his tongue.

If not for the chance of public indecency, Hannibal would take more care, more time. He can luxuriate in fantasy later, thrust his fingers inside himself roughly, twisting and turning and touching everywhere but the one spot that can provide relief, his other hand clenched in a fist at his back, letting the beast within Will use him, abuse him, take from his body for hours. Maybe he won't let himself come, at all; maybe the idea will be too powerful and rip his orgasm from him, anyway.

For now, Hannibal comes with a choked gasp, staggering forward from the mental weight lifted and falling to his knees, boneless. He licks the cum from his hand like wasted icing, and thinks of Will doing the same, sucking down his spend like simple syrup before passing the sweetness back to Hannibal with his tongue.

His head drops back of its own accord. Sighing quietly, Hannibal realizes the potential for his own ruin at Will's nervous, vicious hands.

He welcomes his inevitable defeat.

Alana comes in every day for lunch, but Hannibal finds it difficult to look at her. No matter where he is, the ghost of Will follows him; Hannibal almost fears looking up, as if his subconscious believes that everyone will see his thoughts in his eyes.

“You’ve been awfully distracted the past few days,” Alana finally notes. It’s Wednesday, but all the days in Hannibal’s life currently seem like speed bumps to Sunday. “What’s going on, Hannibal?”

He meets her eyes, and they’re blue, but too clear, too bright. Will doesn’t haunt her like he does Hannibal. “I have much on my mind,” he says. “Many things to consider.”

“Such as?”

“I am thinking of closing the place on weekends.”

Alana frowns. “Why?”

“My time could be spent better elsewhere, I believe.”

“It is your retirement,” says Alana. “You’re perfectly within your right to do whatever the hell you want.” She takes a bite of her usual lunch, the English muffin with pesto cream cheese, accompanied with a slice of today’s savory pastry, Quiche Lorraine.

“I have a standing commitment with Bedelia on Saturdays,” Hannibal tells her. “She accompanies me to various artistic engagements.”

Alana slices off the tip of her Quiche Lorraine with the side of her fork. “What’s on the agenda for this weekend?”

“An opening for an exhibition of kimonos and obis from the Meiji era of Japan,” explains Hannibal. “The BMA is hosting a private curatorial tour for members of the Friends of the Arts of Africa, the Pacific and the Americas.”

“So essentially an art show for the one-percent.”

Hannibal tenses his jaw and licks his lips, annoyed. “Anyone is allowed to donate and join, Alana. Membership is not exclusive.”

Alana snorts. “Whatever you say, Hannibal.” She eats her bite of quiche, and Hannibal tries not to think of Will’s mouth, instead. But while Alana cannot see his thoughts, he transmits them all the same. “You know,” she says, after swallowing, “Will would never be able to attend one of your cultural soirées.”

“I wouldn’t ask him,” Hannibal says. “He would feel out-of-place. Too many opportunities for...visual incidents.”

“A lovely way of putting it.” She sighs, setting her fork down on her plate and crossing her arms on top of the counter. “Just what *is* your relationship with Bedelia, anyway? I know

you're thinking of Will in romantic terms."

"I do believe that is my business," says Hannibal brusquely.

"And Will's continued stability--" She squints, then amends, "Semi-stability? That's mine. And I don't want him getting his heart broken. I'm not trying to be rude; just looking out for him, that's all."

Hannibal sees that her coffee cup is empty and picks it up to refill. "Bedelia," he begins, walking over to the espresso machine, "is a close companion, but nothing I would call romantic. We are not in love, but keep each other's loneliness at bay. The intimacy we share is of a platonic nature."

"So...she's not your type, is that what you're saying?"

"As far as relationships, no, and I am not hers. We tried for a short time, but proved incompatible. It was an enjoyable affair, and one we both recall fondly. Neither of us have any interest in revisiting the past, however much we enjoy our present."

Alana carves off another bit of quiche. "Good," she says. "That's good."

Hannibal looks at her sideways as he pulls a shot of espresso.

Ultimately, Hannibal decides to close Whisked Away on weekends. From a financial standpoint, though that doesn't particularly matter, it makes good business sense. More importantly, at least to Hannibal, it allows him greater flexibility with his social scheduling. There are now morning breakfasts and afternoon luncheons he will be able to attend, should he so choose.

But he doesn't want to lose the opportunity to see Will, and Hannibal's sure that Will would not come into Whisked Away at a time when it might be busy. Hannibal would rather visit with him alone, anyway. However, it is too early in their friendship to invite himself to Will's home, though he would certainly be more comfortable there. It would likewise be in poor taste to ask Will to his own home; though it would provide the quiet Will requires, the environment could prove daunting.

Hannibal considers letting Will visit on a weekday when the shop is officially closed. They have yet to exchange phone numbers, or even addresses. He prefers to send letters whenever possible. Regardless of method, however, Hannibal has no means with which to contact him.

After staring at Beverly's office number for several minutes, Hannibal dials out on his refurbished wooden wall phone, holding the receiver up to his ear.

"Katz speaking," she says after the third ring.

“Good afternoon, Beverly,” says Hannibal into the transmitter. “This is Hannibal. How are you today?”

“Overworked and underpaid,” she replies, laughing. “So nothing new. At least it’s Friday, right?” She exhales loudly, and it crackles in Hannibal’s ear.” How about yourself?”

“I find myself in need of a small favor.”

“Anything for my favorite fop.”

The side of Hannibal’s mouth twitches into a slight frown, but he says nothing about what is probably an endearment. “I was hoping I could add a few things to Will’s weekly grocery list. You will be reimbursed, of course.”

“God, I am so tempted to sing Foreigner at you.” She pauses. “I might anyway if I didn’t think you’d kill me for it.”

“I can hardly kill you,” says Hannibal. “You’re doing a favor for me, after all.”

“That’s...not entirely reassuring,” Beverly admits.

Hannibal chooses not to put her mind at ease and simply moves on. “Do you have a pen and paper handy?”

“Hang on, I’ve got a sticky note here somewh--aha!” He hears Beverly rummaging around in her desk drawer for a pen. “Okay,” she says, clicking the pen, “shoot.”

“A loaf of good Italian bread, pancetta stesa, fresh basil, two cloves of garlic, at least two ounces of pine nuts, a high-quality extra virgin olive oil, kosher sa--”

“Whoa, whoa, slow down.” Hannibal hears the rustle of Beverly’s phone against the shoulder of her shirt. “What came after pine nuts?”

“A high-quality extra virgin olive oil,” repeats Hannibal.

“Appropriate for a high-quality extra virgin.”

Hannibal nearly drops the receiver from his hand. His mouth hangs open. “I...” He remembers how to breathe. “I beg your pardon?”

“Will,” she explains. “Chaste as Galahad.” When Hannibal says nothing, she chuckles loudly. “Oh my God, that’s a thing for you, isn’t it?”

“That’s a very personal question, Miss Katz,” chastises Hannibal after clearing his throat several times.

“I’ll take that as a yes. Alright, what else do you need?”

“Again, Beverly, that’s--”

She fakes a sigh. "I meant groceries, Hannibal."

"Of course." Hannibal finishes collecting himself, then continues slowly enough for her to write it down. "Kosher salt, Pecorino cheese, a small container of whole milk, black peppercorns--"

"I'll go ahead and put you down for a pepper mill, too," says Beverly wryly.

"Excellent. Also a package of Plugra butter--"

"How do I even *spell* that, Hannibal? Also," she continues before Hannibal can spell it for her, "what are all of these ingredients for, exactly?"

"Will mentioned that he had thought to recreate the breakfast sandwiches from when you and Alana brought him here," explains Hannibal, "but he was unsure how to make them. I am sending him the ingredients."

"Hannibal."

"Yes?"

"You do realize Will doesn't have a food processor, right?"

Hannibal's eyebrows knit themselves together. "Ah."

"Hell," Beverly says, "he's probably never even *touched* one."

"I'm..." Hannibal slightly lowers the receiver from his ear, relaxing his arm that he never realized was tensed. "I'm not sure what to do."

"What if I just swing by your place early Saturday afternoon and you can send some pesto with me? And a love note, because I'm drawing the line at delivering a singing telegram."

He doesn't blush, but only because he's trained himself out of the ability to do so.

There's nothing but tall grass and warm darkness, and Hannibal runs through both.

He isn't afraid, has never been afraid of these dreams; the only nightmares he has are of ice and snow and hunger and unbearable light. This has always been Hannibal's refuge. Very often, he has lain here in the soft earth and simply stared into the deep, endless nothing. There has always been a prickle in the back of his mind here, an odd crawling itch beneath his skin that Hannibal has never been able to put a name to.

And then, suddenly, he is not alone.

Hannibal sits up, lets his fingers sink into the shifting dirt as his palms crush the grass. He sees nothing, and hears nothing, and smells--Hannibal scents the vacuum of space to check--nothing. But there is a Something out beyond the trees, the trees that have never been there before but that grow tall and branchless, leafless, supporting an invisible sky.

Eyes look through him, but he doesn't know how to look back, or even Where to look. Hannibal is aware, and that is all, and that is enough. Still, he reaches out toward the trees.

Something settles into his arms and over his skin, touches him in all the places he's never touched. Hannibal gasps and writhes in the grass, hot with unbearable pleasure, prisoner to a torment he doesn't wish to end.

It doesn't.

Hannibal wakes up groaning and cursing, his skin sticky with sweat and the bedclothes damp with it as well. His hands are already between his legs, one pumping his cock at a furious pace, the other rolling and tugging at his balls. Even awake, Hannibal feels like he's boiling inside, burning with it, nothing but flame and heat and smoke.

He comes harder than he ever has in his life, painting ropes of cum across the silk of his pajamas. Limp and loose, Hannibal simply slips back into sleep, just as easily as he slipped out of it.

The rest of the night is calm and dreamless.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Additional Warnings:

-This chapter delves into Hannibal and Bedelia's interesting dynamic. I have added the tag "Hannibal & Bedelia" to the relationship section because, while they are more than friends, all interactions are platonic and non-sexual. (At least, they will no longer *be* sexual, because Hannibal is head over heels for one Will Graham, psychic hermit extraordinaire.) Essentially, he and Bedelia share the same odd intimacy as they do in canon, except no cannibalism and serial killing and general unpleasantness; I've interpreted this intimacy in the frame of a non-sexual D/s relationship.

-We also begin to get an idea of what Will went through during his incarceration, hence the tag "Past Abuse".

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hannibal wakes up an hour late, at five instead of four, uncovered, cold and drenched with the scent of old sweat and spend. Still groggy, he fumbles with the buttons of his nightshirt, only to discover why he smells like cum. "Disgusting," Hannibal says under his breath, then swings his legs off the bed and stands up.

His pants are already untied and pushed down below his ass, which he can't recall doing during the night, and they fall to the floor around his ankles. Hannibal sighs as he steps out of them and into his slippers, leaving the pants lying there. They can be folded and placed in the hamper after he takes a much needed shower. Likewise, he strips himself of the shirt and flips it inside out before letting it, too, flutter to the floor. In case he gets lost on his way back from the en suite bathroom, Hannibal can follow the trail of disgraced silk.

Never has he been more glad for a curbless shower, mostly because Hannibal's never felt so drained upon waking up. Five hours of sleep has always left him feeling suitably refreshed, though he does indulge and take a proper eight once in awhile to compensate for any sleep debt accrued. It's not nearly time for that, however. Even when he begins to feel the fatigue from partial deprivation, it's never like this.

Hannibal's thoughts inevitably turn to Will, wondering how large his sleep debt must be, if there is even hope of repaying it. After adjusting the shower heads above him, Hannibal turns on the water; it's too hot, close to scalding, but he needs to wake up, and cold showers are terrifically unappealing. Besides, it's not as if he could be erect right now if he wanted to be, so a cold shower would be even more purposeless.

He stands under the water long enough for his body to adjust to the temperature, skin red. But it's invigorating, as is the Florentine cypress tree soap he eventually scrubs himself with.

Hannibal knows Bedelia will smell it on him later, regardless of aftershave, and will probably tease him for being sentimental.

Unfortunately, he smells it on himself now, and wonders how Will's own olfaction operates. Is he a hyperosmiac like Hannibal? Or does his unique psychic ability complicate his senses, make him dyosmic according to whose memory he has encountered the smell within before? If that is the case, then what of Will's tastebuds? Does he eat cheaply because the only memories he has of those tastes are his and his alone? Are there foods Will must avoid due to someone else's dislike of it?

And then Hannibal smells the soap again as he puts it back, and imagines smelling it on Will's skin--better yet, smoothing the lather over his body, Will's head thrown back onto Hannibal's shoulder. He can picture himself running a hand over his chest and throat, the other down his abdomen. The Will in his mind is a Will who has been properly cared for, treated as he deserves, so Hannibal feels no ribs. He can spend extra time rubbing soap over the curve of Will's small belly, because it exists.

Hannibal tries to focus instead on the cleansing routine for the careful maintenance of his hair, and fails miserably.

Dressed now in a soft sweater and the pants from his Blackwatch wool pajamas--which Bedelia still hasn't returned the shirt from since she borrowed it on her last visit--Hannibal starts the process of making his morning coffee, grinding the beans and setting water on to boil. While he waits on the water, Hannibal takes the opportunity to bother Bedelia; she's bound to be awake by now, regardless of how much merlot she drank the night before

H: You still have my pajama top.

B: A good morning to you, too.

B: And yes, I know. I'm wearing it now.

H: Do you have any intention of returning it?

B: Not especially. I think I'll keep it as a memento of our final dalliance, since I imagine you intend to court and bed another.

H: You aren't wrong.

H: I will launder the matching pants and bring them to you next Saturday.

B: Such a gentleman.

He pours the coffee and the boiled water into the French press, and waits. Breakfast is, strangely, the furthest thing from his mind, afraid that he'll somehow link that to Will and

never be able to eat unbothered again.

B: Are we still on for this afternoon?

H: Of course. And are you still wearing the lilac?

B: With gold heels. Accessorize appropriately.

Bedelia answers the door almost immediately and, as per usual, is nowhere close to being ready. Her hair is done, at least; Bedelia's side part is more dramatic than usual, and she's curled her long blonde locks before sweeping them up and to the side.

"Do you always answer the door in your lingerie?" Hannibal asks her slyly.

She smiles and says, "Only for you, darling." Bedelia turns around, motioning for Hannibal to follow her upstairs, leaving him to close the door. On her way down the second floor hall, she picks up a glass of chardonnay from an accent table. "Any for you?"

"I would find it very difficult to attend to you and enjoy the wine at the same time."

"Which is why I'm doing my makeup first, of course." She looks at him over her shoulder. "Your boy better be worth it. I'm going to miss our...repartee."

Hannibal smiles with his eyes, deepening the creases at the corners. "I have no intention of giving it up."

"Oh?" She feigns shock, a hand on her chest above the cups of her deep plunge bra. It provides just as much coverage of her cleavage, but Hannibal will not give her the satisfaction of seeing his temptation. As excellent as Bedelia is in playing their games of manipulation and seduction, they must stay out of the bedroom now that he's met Will; Hannibal is uncertain how willing Will would be to share.

In lieu of a straightforward answer, Hannibal only shrugs and says, "It is not as if you and I are in love."

Bedelia chuckles. "Most certainly not. But I'm not sure your--wait, what was your lovely boy's name again?" She passes her glass to Hannibal as she sits down at her vanity, reaching for her stockings. "Or have you even bothered to tell me?"

"Will."

"You will tell me, or his name is Will?" She holds the stockings out to Hannibal and lifts her foot expectantly, toes pointed. "Trade me."

He hands her back the wine, taking the hose from her and placing it in his breast pocket alongside his gold handkerchief. "His name, of course." Hannibal looks around for something to sit on. "I thought you weren't yet in need of my services."

"I seem to have changed my mind," she says, pointing at a footstool. "Your wine can wait, but I can't."

He sits down with no protest. Whatever their mind and word games, Hannibal has never regretted a moment spent in physical submission to her. "As you wish," he says, taking the proffered foot. The lines of intimacy have always been blurred between them--it's what led to their aborted attempt at romance. But Bedelia has never been a romantic, and mental gymnastics, while stimulating, has never been enough for Hannibal.

Even still, should Will ask, he would give this up. So Hannibal takes his liberties now, while he still can, in spite of the depths his love for Will has reached already.

"You always did like my feet," Bedelia murmurs above him, settling back in the vanity chair as much as she dares, wine stem held perfectly still between the first two fingers of her right hand. She carries herself like a queen, and this has always been her throne room.

Hannibal kisses her heel, her arch, the ball of her foot. "I'm very fond of all of you," he says, looking at her over her toes as he kisses once more, just at the join between them and the rest of her foot.

Bedelia looks smug as he moves her foot to rest on his shoulder, allowing him to kiss and caress his way up the inside of her lower leg. "And what would your Will think of such worship, Hannibal?"

He stops, exhales warmly at her knee, and leans back up, settling her foot on his own knee. "Should he return my affection," Hannibal tells her, pulling a stocking from his pocket, "then I will divulge to him the nature of our unusual friendship, of course. I would hide nothing from him."

"Except that you know of his hospitalization," she says pointedly.

"That's hardly the same," insists Hannibal, rolling the stocking up her smooth calves. "Will gave an interview after his release, and he must know that there have been numerous articles written about his case. I am also aware of his gift, having been subject to it myself."

Bedelia takes a sip of her wine and flexes her toes, pulling the stocking from Hannibal's fingers and making him have to start over. "And we both know that, now that you are enamored with him as well as obsessed with his case, you're going to go digging for more information."

He glares at her. "It's for Will's own good. For his comfort."

"And not simply your professional curiosity?" She sets her wine down and bends to look Hannibal in the eye. "What will he say when he learns of it? Learns of your research? Do you think it will be appreciated, or will he only suspect you of manufacturing your love?"

Hannibal ignores her for the time being--he needs a moment to consider his return volley--and focuses instead on settling the lace of her stocking at mid-thigh before trailing his fingers higher. Watching her eyes close and her face slightly flush as they reach the edge and dip under her garter belt is very satisfying.

She composes herself quickly, but Bedelia's always in control of the situation, and Hannibal never expected his distraction to work to his advantage in their tête-à-tête. "I imagine his knowledge of our own relationship would confound things further." Her eyes open again, challenging, fierce. "Wouldn't you agree?"

"I will reveal everything to him when the time is right," Hannibal assures her, and perhaps himself. "Both the nature of our friendship, and my knowledge of his unfortunate, outrageous suffering."

Bedelia pulls at a strap and presents him with the clasp. "For your own heart, I hope you don't wait too long."

"I hold him in the highest regard, and I doubt neither his intellect nor his savvy." He fastens the clasps one by one, careful not to break the lace. She offers no answer, and Hannibal doesn't need to glance up to know that she has returned to her wine. The silence allows his thoughts to return to wooing Will; it truly had never occurred to him to further research Will's incarceration, to look for unpublished information. Perhaps Bedelia's suggestion has merit.

Hannibal switches legs, but the activity has been relegated to autopilot. He doesn't want to hurt Will--even the consideration that he could makes him blanch, makes his stomach churn. But Hannibal wants even more desperately to take care of him, to bring him some kind of peace. To hold him in his arms at night when the memories, both his own and those of others, are too great to bear alone. To follow him into the darkness when he wanders so he can bring him home. To love him.

And to help bear his burden, Hannibal must know.

Bedelia's hands are on his face, thumbs rubbing under his eyes and up to his temples. "You really are taken with him, aren't you?"

"Yes," he whispers.

"I had questioned your true intentions." She runs her fingers through his silvering hair. "I thought you merely meant to fix him."

"He is perfect as he is," he tells her. "Even if he weren't, I would never presume to think him broken. Will is strong, much more so than you or I."

"You admire him, then." Bedelia strokes the side of his face, letting Hannibal lean into her touch. "Don't put him on too high a pedestal. It would be disingenuous to you both." Hannibal follows her hand as she withdraws it, lets himself be led from the footstool to his knees to rest his head in her lap. "You've worked too hard, Hannibal, achieved so much.

Would you let yourself be pulled from your life into his? Would you truly lash yourself to the mast, Ulysses, or forgo the rope and give yourself to the Siren?"

Hannibal closes his eyes, thoughtlessly rubs his cheek against the lace of her stocking. "I would give him my freedom. My life. Everything."

"Oh Hannibal," she says to him soothingly. "'Thou wast slain in thine high places.'"

"'L'acque ch'io prendo già mai non si corse.'" He turns his head to kiss her thigh. "Are you truly distressed for me?"

"Constantly," admits Bedelia. "But more so now than usual." She encourages him between her legs, lets him wind his arms around her, lets him relax his head and tuck his face into the side of her belly.

Hannibal says nothing for a long time, just smells the remnants of lavender soap on her skin, tries to concentrate on the way her fingertips feel on his scalp.

"Tell me about him," she finally says. "Tell me about the man who has captured my Hannibal so completely."

"He's gentle. Kind. Impulsive and mistrusting. Awkward. No conception of propriety, but he's aware of it, attempts to compensate for it. A complete recluse with no interest in the outside world unless it finds him first. When he initially visited the café, it was at the behest of his only friends. He came back the next week on his own to thank me for the food I sent."

"Another strange gentleman." Bedelia sounds amused. "I can hardly wait to make his acquaintance. What else? Perhaps signs from his life before?"

Hannibal takes a deep breath before continuing. "There are still scars on his face from the electroconvulsive therapy. Will wears his hair so as to hide them, but I knew where to look. Alana said his legs bother him at times, cause him pain. I suspect there was..." He buries his face farther into her side, seeking comfort. "Muscular atrophy," he says. "From the disuse and multiple fractures. He's thin. Eats poorly. Wears long sleeves, but--"

"But so do you, so you can't assume he bears scars there, too. Hannibal," she says, "Hannibal, look at me." Bedelia has to practically pull him away from her; she prompts him to lift his eyes to hers with two fingers beneath his chin. "You can't save him. Not from his past, not from himself."

"Will Graham doesn't *need* saving, and I would never insult his character by thinking otherwise."

She blinks at that, as much in surprise at his impassioned response as in acceptance of it. "You will never be able to see him in the ways he is capable of seeing you, however. No matter how much research you do, he will always be better at cutting into your skull."

"Perhaps not, but we do wear the same suit. Neither of us are persons on the inside. Not truly."

Bedelia appraises him, and Hannibal has the uncomfortable feeling of being a pinned moth, collected and studied. She does this to him often, and he always lets her. Hannibal's uncertain anyone else would be able to survive the side he keeps under wraps, but Bedelia does more than that--she embraces it, controls it.

Only Will could run with it.

"Get me my robe," and she stands up with no warning, laughs when he loses his suddenly regained balance. "I think we should stay in today. Call it a girls' night."

Hannibal complies, maneuvering to his feet and pulling her robe from the hook on the back of the door. Bedelia turns to let him slip her arms in the sleeves; Hannibal steps close behind her, chest to back, and ties the sash at her waist.

"Now," and she turns again to begin unbuttoning his suit jacket, "to get this hideous thing off of you."

"You did say to match," Hannibal tells her, putting up no resistance as she pushes his jacket off and to the floor. "I thought the plum suit went best with the lilac shirt."

"It's the gold plaid that's a bit much for me." Bedelia loosens his paisley tie, but doesn't remove it.

"Noted."

"Good. Let's get you that glass of wine. And don't worry," she coyly adds, "I won't take advantage."

Chapter End Notes

Quotes Used & Translations:

"How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places."--2 Samuel 1:25 KJV

"L'acque ch'io prendo già mai non si corse." (The sea I sail has never yet been passed)--Dante's *Paradiso*, Canto II, Line 7 (Longfellow's translation, 1867)

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

I would like to reemphasize that there is no Bedelia/Hannibal in this story. Yes, they're atypically close friends, but they are in canon, as well. I wasn't sure how I would reflect that in this story until I began writing their interactions. It never once occurred to me that it could be misconstrued as cheating on Will, as he and Hannibal aren't even in a romantic relationship. So you have my assurance that there is no cheating.

A few of the comments on the previous chapter were incredibly discouraging. At no point do I feel that I have been misleading about Bedelia and Hannibal's relationship to each other, but I have added a few new tags and adjusted others slightly based on feedback. (In the interest of full disclosure, I've had several friendships of this nature, so my views are undoubtedly different.)

Thank you to those of you who left supportive words either in the comments or on twitter. Further thanks to the members of the Cannibal Pub for reaching out to me in my time of need. Extra thanks to my wonderful betas for being there for me as I cried and swore off writing for twelve or so hours. And thank *you*, dear reader, for sticking with me. It is my sincere hope that you enjoy the chapter. <3

To call Bedelia an alcoholic would be not only impolite, but incorrect, though she does jokingly refer to herself as a lush from time to time. Bedelia, like Hannibal, never drinks to excess, but only for enjoyment. He'd seen her fairly intoxicated during their enrollment at the Università degli Studi di Firenze ; they both enjoyed their lives in Florence in every way possible. Since then, however, they have never been drunk, either apart or together.

Bedelia is currently on the edge of remarkably tipsy; Hannibal, on the other hand, has skipped over the line to merrily drunk.

At some point between the second and third bottle of wine, Hannibal had undone his tie entirely, though he left it on, ends trailing down his chest. His waistcoat hangs open, too, thanks to Bedelia's nimble fingers, at which point she had gleefully noted his slight paunch.

"This is an older shirt, isn't it?" Bedelia asks, poking her finger through one of the barely-there gaps between the buttons to playfully stroke at his skin. "You were going to be uncomfortable for me all afternoon, Hannibal? I'm flattered."

Hannibal looks at her indignantly, because he can't quite mask his emotions under the influence. "I enjoy life to its fullest." After a lengthy pause wherein Bedelia undoes the top buttons of the offending shirt, he adds, "Also I bake many pastries."

“Admit it,” she says, shifting in his lap to reach the half-drunk third bottle from the coffee table. “You just want to make poor Will chubby. So you can be chubby together.”

“I am *not* chubby,” he huffs. “As for Will, I merely want to provide for him. His eating habits are atrocious and unhealthy.”

“And plying him with dessert is going to fix his nutrition?”

“No, but dinner beforehand will.” Hannibal drains the rest of the bordeaux from his glass, which is the completely wrong glass to be using, which he should be ashamed of. “And perhaps lunch. And breakfast.”

Bedelia laughs. “You’re going to turn him into a hobbit is what you’re going to do.”

“I am *not* --”

She tops off her own glass before tipping up the bottle and refilling Hannibal’s. “Shut up and drink your wine.”

Hannibal sips at it. “I had thought you weren’t going to take advantage of my emotional state.”

“And here I thought you knew me.” Bedelia wipes a drop of wine from the corner of Hannibal’s lip and pops it into her mouth. “I’ll miss kissing you the most,” she says. “I would say I would miss the sight of you on your knees, but you’ve never denied me that view before, and I doubt you’ll start now.”

He eyes her predatorily, then dumps her off his lap and onto the sofa. Bedelia’s wine sloshes out of her glass and onto the white leather, but she’s just snorting inelegantly in amusement. Sliding out of his seat, Hannibal returns to kneeling in front of her, grinning smugly before toasting her and drinking his wine.

“You can always think of Will and I at night,” says Hannibal. “To keep you warm.”

Bedelia sighs wistfully. “We’ll always have Florence, I suppose.”

Hannibal’s phone suddenly chirps from across the room where it rests in the inner pocket of his suit jacket. She looks at him, raises an eyebrow, then jumps up to go get it before Hannibal has a chance to. It takes her a few seconds longer than it should to locate and retrieve the phone, but she does, and immediately unlocks it to see the notification.

“An unknown number,” Bedelia tells him. “Now who could it possibly be?”

“You will give me my phone.” Hannibal holds out his hand expectantly, but doesn’t move from the floor. All he does is change his position, now with his back to the couch, sitting in the floor. Or, more accurately, sprawling.

Bedelia ignores him and opens the text. ““This is Will Graham,”” she reads. ““Is this Hannibal Lecter?”” Biting her lip, she begins typing a reply.

And now Hannibal is on his feet, setting his glass on the coffee table, practically running across the room to yank his phone out of Bedelia's hands. Standing with her arms crossed and head held high, she looks triumphant, probably because she'd managed to send a text before he rescued his cell.

W: Why do you have Hannibal's phone? Also who are you?

H: My apologies. I am at the home of a close friend, and she found it humorous to take my phone.

W: Oh. Why?

H: Because we are somewhat intoxicated.

H: I assure you, this is not a regular occurrence. It has been several decades since we drank excessively together.

W: It's not really my business. Ask Bev and Lana about my whiskey bottle.

H: It might have been mentioned.

W: Goddammit.

A few minutes pass, and Hannibal begins to worry that he's divulged information he shouldn't have. Bedelia perches on the back of the loveseat behind where he stands, pulling him between her legs. Her arms hug around his torso, and she wraps her legs around his waist to keep him there.

"I'm a close friend, huh?" she asks, looking over Hannibal's shoulder.

"Uninvited voyeurism is rude, Bedelia."

"Shut up, Hannibal, you love me." Bedelia hooks her chin over his shoulder to keep spying on his conversation.

W: I wanted to thank you for the extra groceries. And the pesto. It's delicious.

H: You're very welcome.

W: I still made the sandwiches wrong.

W: Or maybe they just taste better when you make them.

"I would like to point out at this juncture that your inamorato is flirting with you," she says, kissing him on the neck.

Hannibal tips his head to the side to rest it on top of hers. "A compliment, nothing more."

"For someone so intelligent, you are really very stupid."

He bristles, and lifts his head back up, frowning at his phone.

H: Perhaps you would like to come back to the café. Then I can show you how to make them yourself.

W: It's just that I've been out a lot lately and I kind of need to stay home for a bit. I get very nervous driving long distances.

H: Why is that?

W: I've got the windows to my hatchback tinted but I still worry about seeing people. Accidents.

H: I hadn't thought of that.

W: About seeing people.

H: Yes?

W: Well I have your number now and I like to have corresponding photos of the people I have numbers for. It's good to see a friend's face without getting sucked into their memories.

Bedelia hugs Hannibal more tightly. "That's so incredibly sad."

"It is a..." Hannibal licks his lips, searching for the right words. "A very difficult situation. From my experience, he seems to be able to look at a person after experiencing a part of their lives, at least for a short moment. I don't know how long it lasts for, this moratorium on his abilities."

"I'm sure it was tested at some point," Bedelia whispers in his ear, ever the snake, the temptor.

"That's very likely." His voice is steady, but his mind is roiling. She always knows the best ways to pique his curiosity.

H: Are you asking for a photograph of me?

W: Yes.

W: Please.

W: If that's okay.

"Ask him for one back," Bedelia insists. "And send him one of me."

"Whatever for?"

"Humor me."

H: That is perfectly alright. Might I have one of you in return?

W: Sure.

H: Bedelia would also like to send you a photo.

W: Why?

H: I believe I mentioned that we are drunk.

W: I bet you're a fun drunk.

H: What makes you think that?

W: I dunno. You just seem the type.

“He’s not wrong.” Bedelia dangles her now empty glass from her fingers. “Go sit on the couch and let me take a picture of you. I don’t trust you to take a good selfie.” She untangles herself from around him and pushes him away, chuckling when he staggers a bit. “It’s like breaking into the Uffizi all over again.”

“Considering I am still coherent at this time, not to mention unfettered,” says Hannibal, heading for the couch and plopping down on it unceremoniously, “this is absolutely *not* like breaking into the Uffizi.”

“I still have that sketch, you know.” She sets her glass down on the coffee table next to Hannibal’s and takes his phone from where it’s clenched in his hand.

“Do you?”

“Hmm. Though I imagine you would’ve done a much better job had you been less distracted by...your cuffed and stimulated circumstances.” Bedelia leans forward and rearranges Hannibal’s tie, combs a hand through his hair to try and unmuss it. “You look just as ravished and disheveled, though. Smile.” She takes several photos, chooses the one she likes best, and sends it along with a text before Hannibal realizes she’s even typing.

W: You look like you're having fun.

W: Tell Bedelia that I already assumed she was looking over your shoulder.

W: And that I appreciate her unnecessary reassurance that you haven't had sex.

W: You're very attractive. Even when you aren't put together.

“Yes,” Bedelia says as Hannibal stands up, grabbing the phone and reading the texts. “He is *definitely* flirting with you. Not very well, but nonetheless. Will is interested, and now I must see a photo of him.”

H: Thank you, Will.

W: Your profile was nice when we were in person. But it's wonderful to see your eyes again.

W: And you seem...soft.

W: But I would be too if I baked the things you do so.

“Did he just call you fat?” Bedelia’s shoulders shake with suppressed laughter and she clings to Hannibal’s arm.

“No,” Hannibal says slowly, “he called me ‘soft’.” He doesn’t mention how his thoughts have turned once more to spending time in the kitchen with Will. Teaching him how to make filling foods; letting him taste as they go; hearing those same noises Will made at Whisked Away over the cookies.

W: I’m sorry. I probably shouldn’t have said that.

H: No need for apologies. I am not ashamed of my physique. And I am in excellent health besides.

W: Don’t think I’ve ever been either of those. Like I told you before, I’m nothing special.

H: Send me a picture. Let me be the judge of that.

“Oh, very nice,” says Bedelia. “Very smooth. I’m suitably impressed.”

The minutes tick by, and they both sit back down. Bedelia leans back against the arm of the couch and puts her feet in Hannibal’s lap; he strokes them absentmindedly, but wonders how Will’s feet would feel comparatively. His mind wanders, leading him to consider what scars Will might carry on them, on his legs. If he would enjoy having them touched, or if Will would push Hannibal away and tell him to stop, the remembrance of his forced hospitalization too much.

Hannibal lets Bedelia have the phone, glancing over once to watch her taking pictures of herself. When she sends the photo, Will is bound to ask about the nature of their relationship, which will at least get *that* conversation out of the way.

She never took her stockings off; she’d said that after making Hannibal put them on her, she was disinclined to remove them. So it isn’t her skin but the nylon that passes under his fingers. He had been too drunk to notice the moment he laid hands on her here on the couch. Now he’s doing his best *not* to think of Will and--

“What is it with you and feet and legs, anyway?” she asks quietly, looking through the pictures, deleting most of them.

“Society defines us by our use or disuse of them, by our ability and disability,” explains Hannibal. “It is wrong to do so, but the fact remains. They carry us, whether physically or not.”

Bedelia scoffs. “I’m going to get you to admit to your foot fetish eventually.”

“It’s been thirty years. I very much doubt it.”

Hannibal’s phone dings again, and he snatches it from Bedelia mid selfie. He opens the text, and his breath flies from his lungs.

Will is lying down in his bed. It's a simple affair--a single pillow, single blanket, no sheets but the bottom one covering the mattress. Hannibal blinks, and places Will in his own bed instead, surrounded by pillows and softness. The setting is far more suitable, and allows him to concentrate on Will.

His curls are in disarray, and Hannibal can see more clearly the halo of burns left by electrodes. Will looks directly up and into the camera, his arm outstretched to give Hannibal a full view of his bare chest, his stomach. Lying above his head, his free arm is hit directly by natural light--Will's bed must be near at least one window, but Hannibal imagines the light is cast by his own fireplace. It makes the sight easier.

Around his wrist are a series of deep red scars, raised in some areas where they'd healed improperly. Even from the distance of the camera, Hannibal can see track marks up and down his arm from frequent injections, blood draws, and intravenous drips. Another set of angry scars, thick bands around his upper arms just below his shoulders. Hannibal hopes that Will doesn't remember receiving all of them, then realizes that, even if he didn't, it's entirely possible he could've pulled the event out of an orderly's head. He wants to catalogue each forced imperfection with his fingertips, replace the memories of pain with far more pleasurable sensation.

Will's eyes are wide and nervous, and Hannibal wishes the camera was closer, because he wants to stare into them in any way he can. Now that he's been drug into their depths, Hannibal longs to drown again. He wants Will to pull all of his secrets from him one by one until he lays beneath him, flayed raw.

It occurs to him suddenly that Will is displaying himself on purpose. He's inviting Hannibal to question, or perhaps wondering if Hannibal will. A challenge, then.

H: You're beautiful, Will. So very, very beautiful.

W: And you're drunk.

H: The wine has made me bolder and less reserved, yes. But I would find you beautiful without it.

H: I would be honored to draw you some day.

W: I don't know what to say.

H: Say you'll consider it.

W: Alright. I'll consider it.

H: Excellent.

W: Can we talk again later?

W: I really enjoyed our conversation but sometimes talking is exhausting. Even without speaking.

H: I understand. And yes. I would enjoy that.

W: Good.

W: Thanks, Hannibal.

H: Of course.

“If the smile on your face gets any dopier,” says Bedelia sleepily from the other side of the couch, “I will surely die.”

Hannibal looks at her, but says nothing, simply hands her the phone. She pulls up the conversation again, and scrolls up for the photo.

“Oh,” she says. “Hannibal, he’s *gorgeous*. ”

“Yes,” he replies, yawning himself, too warm from all the wine. “He is.”

“I don’t suppose you’d like to share him?”

Hannibal laughs and lets his head fall back to rest on the couch. “I believe that’s a question for another time, Bedelia.” He’d never speak on Will’s behalf, anyway; too many people have spoken both for and through him for a lifetime.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Have I told you all that you're the best? 'Cause y'all are the best. Thank you for all of the lovely comments and kind words on the last chapter. I haven't had the testicular fortitude to answer comments recently--beyond the weird trolling, I get anxious sometimes--but know that I read each and every one, and truly appreciate that you took the time to encourage me. <3

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was the best of hangovers, it was the worst of hangovers, et cetera, et cetera, and so forth.

“Ugh,” said Bedelia, face down at the breakfast table. “You’re such a drama queen.”

“My brain is attempting to vacate through my sinuses, Bedelia,” said Hannibal from the stove, attempting to cook the greasiest eggs and bacon as humanly possible. Or, at least, Hannibally possible. “I will misquote Dickens as much as I like.”

“I’m surprised it’s not Dante.”

Hannibal scoffs and prods the bacon. “I would never dare butcher Dante.”

Bedelia groans again, putting her arms over her head. “Did we have hangovers this terrible back in undergrad? Post-grad? Ever?”

“We were young and reckless and immune to...” He rubs at a temple, turns to look at her, then immediately regrets it. “I don’t know, everything.”

“True. For example,” she says, lifting an elbow to glare at him, “I was immune to your...your utter, uncharacteristic post-drunk bitchiness and inability to fabricate purple prose.”

“I object to all of that, and fully intend to burn your bacon.”

Bedelia’s elbow drops back to the table. “Fine. Let it burn. Just come get me out of these hose.”

“You’re fully capable.”

“And so are you.”

“If I’m going to remove your stockings and garters,” he says, frowning at the imperfect eggs, “then you should remove mine.” Hannibal tosses the spatula over his shoulder and into the sink; it splashes into the soapy water. “Sock garters aren’t even complicated.”

Bedelia exhales loudly. “Where even *are* your pants?”

“You mentioned something about burning them.”

“Ugh, will you just come take these off?” She dangles an arm off the table, pointing at the floor.

Hannibal huffs. “I don’t want to.”

“You’re lying.”

“I resent that accusation greatl--”

“Knees. Here. *Now.* ”

Hannibal grumbles, taking the skillet with the bacon and moving it off the hot eye, then dumping the pan with the now crispy eggs into the dry side of the sink. “Thank you for not snapping,” he says petulantly, holding his head between his hands and easing himself to the floor beside her. But he doesn’t move to unclasp the stockings, just lays his forehead against her thigh. “That’s cold. That feels wonderful.”

“I bet Will wouldn’t take this long.”

“I imagine Will would simply tell you no.”

“If you’ll just cooperate, I’ll give you a pedicure,” she promises. “In the bath, even.”

Hannibal looks up at her. “Only if you let me wash your hair.”

“Make me coffee, and we’ll talk.” Bedelia smirks down at him, moving her head only as much as necessary.

“You constantly abuse my inclination to serve,” says Hannibal, feeling about to unclasp her stocking without moving his forehead.

“And you love it.”

“Yes,” he says, sighing as he undoes the first clasp on her left leg. “Yes, I do.”

The drive home is long and arduous, but at least Hannibal’s clean. He’s glad to have left a spare pair of pants at Bedelia’s, as it turned out that she had, indeed, chucked his suit pants in

the fireplace at some point the night before. Hannibal wants nothing more than to crawl between the cool sheets of his bed and pass out. Blurry eyed and aching, he finally arrives, parking the car with much less finesse than usual, and dragging himself inside with a peculiar sense of shame as to what the neighbors might think.

Hannibal doesn't fold his clothes for the second day in a row; he hopes this isn't something he'll make a habit of, but he's currently too tired to care. It's a number of minutes past five--probably, but he has no inclination to check--and Hannibal is going to sleep.

He's just situated himself in bed when his phone receives a message. If it's Bedelia, he's going to kill her. Twice.

Luckily for his favorite domineering woman, it's Will.

W: Hello.

H: Afternoon.

W: I wanted to check in on you after last night. Are you feeling okay?

H: I'm groveling in the mud in the third circle of the inferno.

W: Oh.

W: I'm guessing that means you have the mother of all hangovers then?

H: Very much so.

The phone doesn't go off anymore after that, but now that he's spoken to Will in his bed, the image he'd painted the day before sifts back to the top of his brain. Hannibal imagines Will in his arms, Will's back pressed against his chest, Hannibal's nose buried in his curls with his lips resting against his neck. Nothing lascivious; only comfort, warmth, the familiarity of skin to skin. Maybe Will would feel more at ease holding Hannibal, and that would be fine, too, to lace their fingers together and hold them against the slow, easy beat of his heart.

Hannibal has almost drifted off to sleep--it's so simple to tell himself bedtime stories here in the dark--when the phone chimes once more.

W: Would it be okay if we talked?

W: We don't have to. I know you feel ill.

H: I can't guarantee that I will be awake for long. It would be rude of me to fall asleep on you.

W: It's fine if you do.

W: Just wanted to hear your voice.

H: And I yours. Call as you will.

So Hannibal waits, turns over now to lie on his back, immediately missing the chill of the pillow against his face. His eyelids are heavy, but he refuses to give into his body's urge to nod off. This is the first phone call he has truly anticipated in many, many years; it feels like it's been an age since he heard Will's voice, when it's only been a week. The obsession over B1327-5 that had run bone deep for the last fifteen years was nothing compared to the hunger he feels for Will Graham. They're the same person, yes, but this...

Hannibal had loved B1327-5 in a way that frightened him; now, he's in love with Will, and he is infinitely more afraid.

The phone rings, and his heart jumps. Hannibal's hands shake as he checks the ID to make sure, then answers the call.

"Hello, Will," and the smile creeps onto his face unbidden, as if he's a teenager infatuated with his instructor all over again.

A pause, and another, and then, "Hey. Hi, Hannibal."

"How are you today?"

"Um. Well." Will hesitates, Hannibal assumes from either nerves or embarrassment, though he wouldn't know the reason for the latter. "I'm okay, I guess."

"You can tell me if you aren't."

Will sighs. "I don't want you to think I just called you to--it's not like you're my therapist, you know."

"We're only talking, Will," says Hannibal. "Only a conversation."

"Right. Yeah, alright."

"So how are you really?"

"Scared."

Hannibal frowns. "Of what, Will?"

"This is gonna sound awful, but...you."

The room remains temperate, but Hannibal is chilled. Goosebumps crawl up his arms and the back of his neck. It's like Hannibal's frozen inside, a return to the cold of his past that he's so terribly accustomed to.

"Shit," Will says quickly, "it's not like that. Please, don't think it's like that."

Hannibal isn't sure if Will picked up on his emotions. Perhaps he is more empathic than Alana believed him to be. There wasn't anything regarding it in any of the scholarly articles, or even in the interview Will gave to Freddie Lounds.

“I’m scared of how I feel about you,” Will continues, cutting through the silence. “We’ve only spoken four times. Only in person twice. But I...”

He can close his eyes and see Will now, see him from above, see him lying in his bed. It’s nothing to bring him back to Hannibal’s own; his body turns to its side to face Will, a parasympathetic response as natural as breathing.

“Go on,” Hannibal urges him, trying to keep the choking desperation out of his voice.

“I can still taste the ortolan in my mouth. Hannibal, I--I *know you*. And it terrifies me.” His voice is quiet, but just this side of hysterical, a barely contained tremor. “I can’t even figure out why I pulled that memory in particular. Usually, I can. That scares me, too.”

Hannibal swallows around the lump in his throat; he remembers the taste of the bunting now, too. “If it helps,” he says, “we could play quid pro quo again.”

“And...what would you say if we did?”

He opens his eyes at last, looks into Will’s as he lies in the bed beside him, so real Hannibal swears he could reach out and touch him. “I would tell you that I have been consumed with thoughts of you since our first meeting.”

Will chuckles into the phone, nothing more than a relieved exhale, but laughter just the same.

“Do you mind if I put you on speaker?” asks Hannibal.

“It would be very hypocritical of me right now to tell you no.”

Hannibal feels the corner of his mouth drift upward. The other joins it as he presses the speaker icon and lays the phone next to his head. “Your eyes haunt me,” he admits.

“From when I stole your secret meal?”

“Yes.” His eyes blink slowly, but Hannibal fights it. He can’t let sleep pull him under, not now. “Seeing them again, seeing you...it made me ache.”

“That’s...that’s a very good way of describing how I felt, too.”

“I would like to see you again,” Hannibal says quickly. “If that is amenable to you.”

Will makes a sound like he’s in pain. “As much as I want to, I...” He trails off, and all Hannibal can hear is his breathing.

“What, Will?”

“I’m not ready to leave my house,” Will tells him, “and, as much as I feel like I know you--”

“You feel uncomfortable allowing me in your house.”

“Yeah,” says Will quietly. “I’m sorry.”

Hannibal assures him, “You have nothing to apologize for. There is neither blame nor shame in being primarily housebound. I would never dare to hold such a thing against you.”

His laugh now is rueful. “Hannibal, you’re more forgiving than most.”

“There are none among us who can claim complete physical, mental, or emotional ability and not be a liar.”

“Yeah? What about you? You and your ‘physique’ as you called it?”

And Hannibal’s fully awake again now. “Will--”

“No, no, shit, I’m--” Will’s voice trembles. “I’m sorry, that was unfair.”

“It would seem there has been much unfairness in your life,” Hannibal says gently. His hand rubs idly at the blanket; it itches to touch Will, to ease his obvious pain. “I won’t hold that against you, either.”

“I still feel bad about it.”

“Unnecessary guilt, I assure you. Shall I take my turn?”

“...If you like.”

Hannibal takes a deep breath. “There was a time during my early schooling,” he begins, “when I sought therapy for a...” He stops, trying to determine the best phrasing. “An urgent craving from my childhood. It became nearly impossible for me to feed myself. I enrolled myself in an intensive outpatient program to learn how to cope with my illness, but it still plagues me once in a while. Bedelia was a psychiatrist. She...talks me through it, sometimes, when the urges become too great, when food turns to ash in my mouth.”

“So you have problems eating, too?”

The weight lifts from Hannibal’s chest. “I did, for a long time. But I was lucky enough to discover my talent for the culinary arts. My studies and practice helped me learn to love food and the pleasure derived from good eating, as well as fostering an enjoyment in the feeding of others. An unconventional therapy with regards to the treatment of disordered eating, perhaps, but one that has worked quite well for me.”

“Huh.” Hannibal flicks his eyes back over to Will’s side of the bed, then realizes exactly how gone for him he is, if he’s already calling it Will’s side. “Is that why you send me food and give me sweets?” says Will, and Hannibal swears he hears a hint of flirtation.

“Quid pro quo,” Hannibal tells him. “I believe it’s your turn.”

“Oh, wow, um...” Will swallows audibly. “I--listen, can we agree to something?”

“Of course.”

“I want to continue this game, trading information,” he says. “It makes conversation very easy for me. There’s a path, rules to follow.”

“Do you like having rules, Will?” And oh, Hannibal’s mind is running wild with that idea.

Will clears his throat. “I, um. Maybe? Sometimes? I don’t--I don’t really know.”

“There is nothing to be embarrassed about,” says Hannibal. “I’ll count that as your turn. I like to follow rules, too.” He grins and adds, “Maybe sometimes.”

“Bedelia?”

“Very astute of you.” Hannibal can’t help it--he reaches a hand out, caresses the air above the pillow where he imagines Will’s hair would be.

“Are the two of you...you know. Together?” The sound of rustling sheets comes through the speaker; the image of Will leaning up on his elbows and forearms to look at the phone comes through Hannibal’s head.

He doesn’t quite know what to say, so he opts for the whole truth. Like the photo would have done the night before, had she been sober enough to remember to send it, this little game of exchange is an apt opportunity for discussing his and Bedelia’s strange relationship. “We have known each other for more than three decades and share what you might call an unusual friendship. While we dated for a time, we soon discovered that we were better off as friends with...certain benefits.”

“Such as?”

“I enjoy serving,” says Hannibal. “She enjoys ordering. It is no longer sexual, though it was for a long time. Dominance and submission can take many forms, Will, each with their own certain satisfactions and fulfillments.”

“Oh.” Will’s breathing has picked up. “I--I mean, um...that would be interesting to see. Or watch, I suppose. You and your friend.”

Hannibal’s shoulders shake with his mirth. “I’ll file that away for future use.”

“Okay,” says Will, sounding a bit antsy. “So, uh, to track back a bit. I was going to ask if we could continue these memory trades, but you seem to be intensely okay with that.”

“I am.”

Hannibal can hear Will plop down on the bed; he thinks about his head hitting the pillow, sinking into it. “I wanted to ask...” Hannibal sees Will lick his lips nervously. “If we’re going to play this game, this quid pro quo of yours, then I need to know you aren’t going to look me up. You know,” he adds quickly, “like I could easily Google you, find things out. And you could do the same with me. But I’m asking you not to. I’m asking you to let me unravel myself at my own speed.”

Here, another perfect opportunity to reveal what he knows. But Hannibal can't. The words, "I already know about your past," get caught in his throat. The phrase, "I know what they did to you," settles in his stomach, sour. The sentence, "I have nightmares about what else they could have done to you that I *don't* know," is a cold stone in his heart.

Instead, he says, "I won't look for anything. I promise you. On your own terms." Hannibal means it--he has no intention of looking for information beyond what he already knows. He tells himself that it's better this way, for Will to reveal himself piece by piece. Perhaps the entire truth, what Hannibal knows and what Will's lived, will come out in a session of quid pro quo. But he can't hurt Will now by showing his hand when Will hasn't even been dealt in.

"Thank you," says Will. "Just...thank you."

It's quiet on both ends of the phone.

"I was a psychiatrist, Will," Hannibal admits, because that's as close to a full truth as he can come. "It is important for you to know that."

"I already knew," and Will says it immediately. "Lana told me. So I could process it before I came into Whisked Away."

"It seems Alana prepared both of us for your visit."

"What did she tell you?"

Hannibal smiles, wide and sleepy and full of joy. "That we had much in common. That you were lonely and intelligent and that we would get along well. Some..." Hannibal shakes his head, because he has to tell Will. He *has* to. "Don't tell Alana or be upset with her. She gave me some basic information about your life experience. If you would like to, please ask her for the same about mine. I will not reveal what was said, as I promised her I wouldn't, and I want to give you the chance to speak for yourself."

He imagines Will closing his eyes and wrapping his arms around himself for comfort, as he did in the café with his flannel shirt. "You don't know how much I appreciate that."

"Will?"

"Yes?"

Hannibal bites his bottom lip, a slight snarl to his top lip, a nervous habit of his own. "I have a proposition for you, to allow us to visit while you are unable to have visitors or leave your home."

"What do you propose?" Will's voice almost disappears at the last word.

"I would like to bring you dinner some evenings," says Hannibal. "I can leave your portion on the porch and return to my car for a few minutes to allow you to collect it. We can eat together and speak through the door, as Alana and Beverly have done before."

“You’d do that?” Will asks, shocked. “You’d go to that kind of trouble just for me?”

“I told you, Will,” replies Hannibal, settling the side of his head further into the pillow. “Let me be the judge of how special you are.”

“Alright,” says Will after the longest seconds of Hannibal’s life. “That sounds good. Having meals with you, continuing our conversations.”

“Thank you, Will.”

“For what?”

Hannibal curls his hand around the edges of the phone. “For allowing me to care for you.”

Chapter End Notes

Did you know that I keep [a pinterest board](#) for this fic? You do now! Learn how to make all the delicious, pretentious nonsense Hannibal does. Well, I mean, Hannibal in this fic, at least. There are no cannibalism tips pinned to my board. Sorry to disappoint.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

I continue to be astounded and bolstered by your lovely comments. Hoping to be back in a good head space to answer them soon! Additionally, I'm trying to stay at least a chapter ahead of posting, plus I also have a couple of short fics to work on over the next few days, so chapter ten may not post until next week. Until then, perhaps you might enjoy the [pinterest board](#)? <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Even though three people had given him directions, Hannibal had still been uncertain as to whether he would actually find the farmhouse. He knew where to go as far as the main road was concerned, but it was the drive past that point which worried him, given that all three sets of directions from that point on had been vague.

Beverly, for instance, had told him to follow the woods, which was useless, considering that was the entire left hand side of the road. Alana had said to look for the flat, muddied fields, which was also useless; beyond being the entire right hand side of the road, the mud was hardly visible. Both had warned him of the possibility of random dogs darting across the road, but Hannibal was disinclined to believe them. Will was alpha of his pack; he would have warned them away from the road. Perhaps he shared a hive mind with them and could simply tell them to stop, regardless of the distance between them. It wouldn't surprise Hannibal, at all.

Likewise, the esoteric nature of Will's directions hadn't shocked him, either. "I'll have the porch lights on," Will had told him. "From a distance, it will look like a boat on a calm sea. There are trees and brush, like a reef that crowds into the water, staking its claim." He'd paused before adding, "You'll know it when you see it," as if that was all the direction Hannibal needed.

And so, in spite of himself, Hannibal had followed his gut instinct to ignore Beverly and Alana's instructions in favor of Will's faith in him. The pavement dwindles into gravel, the gravel into dirt. For a few moments, Hannibal's afraid that he'll be stuck in the mud that Alana told him about, but the dirt is firm and packed, almost a better road than the asphalt had been. Maintained by an unseen hand, Hannibal thinks, then dismisses the thought as too fantastic and outlandish.

Will's trust had been certain, though, and not misplaced.

Dusk has fallen by the time Hannibal and his Bentley pull into Will's driveway. Though he knew the portable warmer would keep dinner at the proper temperature during the trip, given that the car's lighter had very rarely been used and the warmer was almost brand new,

Hannibal had worried about the possibility of the duck drying out, or the pasta and cheese congealing, sticking to the inside of the ramekins. The need to navigate had done an excellent job of pushing these concerns from his mind, but now, faced with Will's home, they come creeping back.

H: I'm here.

W: I knew you'd find it.

H: Where shall I leave your dinner?

W: I made it out of my house today. Onto the porch, at least.

W: I set out a small table and chair you can pull over for yourself. So we can sit beside each other. But you can leave mine there first.

W: It's in front of the window. Your right, but stage left.

H: Do you share my love of the theatre?

W: I watch a fair amount of PBS. And I read a lot of plays.

H: Let me bring you your meal. Perhaps this can be our topic for this evening.

W: Okay. I'll be waiting.

W: Thank you, in advance.

Hannibal steps out of his car, and goes around to the passenger side so he can set up the meal. The appetizer, main course, and dessert are self-contained, labeled in correct order of consumption; he pours the soup into a lidded bowl from its thermos, but leaves the after dinner coffee in its carafe, waiting for dessert. Forks, knife, spoon, cloth napkin, and containers are nicely arranged. It pains Hannibal to not be setting a proper table, but it can't be helped. He simply must make do.

The wine, however, must be opened at the table to allow it to breathe before the third course, and the coffee must be poured at dessert. Hannibal's not exactly sure how that will work, but trusts that inspiration shall strike when the time comes. There's no artistry to this; he's not convinced the meal will taste as it should without the flourishes. It isn't as if this is breakfast, or even a light lunch. He allows himself a single sigh of frustration; any more might bleed the wrong emotion into his voice.

A nagging feeling in his gut tells him that Will will likely know, anyway.

Hannibal starts the trip from the car to the porch with the tray. It's a lovely set-up, neat and tidy, complete with chairs Will probably doesn't use for visitors he hardly ever has. The siding is a pleasant cream color with the frames at window and door painted a bright yellow. Hannibal's reminded of the lemon cookies Will is so fond of, and his heart lightens as he goes up the steps.

He places the tray on the table and raises his fist to rap on the door, then hesitates and looks down at the pocket on his suit jacket. Abigail had brought him a tiny bunch of miniature white carnations, bundled up in her fist as if they would fly away before she got them safely to him. Hannibal takes a deep breath, then pulls them from in front of his paisley handkerchief, and sets them on the tray, as well.

Three quick knocks on the door, and Hannibal turns quickly to descend down the stairs. He hears Will open the door behind him, and it takes every ounce of willpower Hannibal has not to turn around and look.

Setting up his own food on his own tray is a quick affair, though he does have to make a second trip to the car for the thermos of soup, the bottle of wine, and the wine glasses. The coffee and white tumblers will simply have to wait. Moving the table and chair is a quick matter, and Hannibal begins to open the wine when he hears what sounds like a lock being undone, and then another.

A panel in the door swings out, nearly hitting him in the face.

“Sorry,” says Will, sliding a screen into place. Hannibal realizes it’s to keep out bugs, but the whole affair makes him feel like he’s come to confession. “I should’ve accounted for you standing there.”

Hannibal finishes removing the cork soundlessly; considering how close his fingers are to shaking, he’s surprised that he was able to uncork it properly. “I never would have known there was a false panel in your door.”

“That was kind of the idea.”

“So I assumed,” Hannibal says, sitting down. “My apologies for being unable to pull out your chair.”

Will laughs. “Think that’s my own fault.” He adds, more quietly but with no less happiness, “You brought me flowers.”

Hannibal hears Will pulling out his own chair and sitting down, and realizes they sit next to each other. All that stands between them is a door. If he wasn’t so thankful to be here, Hannibal would be in agony. “A gift from young Abigail,” he tells Will. “I thought to pass along her smile.”

“She’s the one who gets two cookies on Wednesdays, right?”

“The same.”

“Well, I guess I’ll have to send her something via you.” Will’s grin is the loudest Hannibal’s ever heard it. “I see that the containers are numbered. And there’s two forks. You’re going to have to guide me here, Hannibal.”

“Ah, yes. Of course. Obviously,” Hannibal begins, “we shall start with the first and proceed onward.”

“Yeah, I think I got that part down already.” Hannibal looks to his right and imagines Will rolling his enchanting eyes. If he focuses, it’s like the door doesn’t even exist; there’s no cage between them. Hannibal hears the hollow pop of a lid coming off a container. “This looks like...soup?” Will sniffs it. “Hannibal, did you make me tomato soup?”

Hannibal feels the back of his neck heat, which hasn’t happened in an extremely long time. He distracts himself from the unwanted reaction by concentrating on pouring his own soup with more care than necessary. “I thought to make you foods I knew you enjoyed, based on Beverly’s purchases for you at the grocer.”

“I’m going to take a wild guess and say this contains more than just tomato paste and high fructose corn syrup.”

He tries to contain the noise of horror, but if the sputtering chuckle on the other side of the door can be trusted, Hannibal failed. “Tomatoes, potatoes, onions, garlic, thyme, and parsley. Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Milled, pureed, and run through a sieve. A touch of creme fraiche whisked in at the finish. I would have garnished with chervil,” Hannibal admits, “but it wouldn’t have been practical.”

“And why’s that?” He hears Will’s spoon clink against the side of the borosilicate glass, tries to picture his perfect mouth as he had before. Is Will aware of proper soup etiquette? If not, would he be receptive to learning? Continuing that line of thought, would Hannibal want him to change, to be instructed in proper table manners? “Hannibal?”

“The chervil tastes best when freshly chopped,” he explains, not missing a beat. “Seeing as the drive is over an hour, assuming optimal instead of typical traffic, it would have been substandard when I arrived.” Hannibal frowns. “And I am not in possession of a portable cutting surface, so bringing the work with me was out of the question.”

“You don’t do a damn thing by halves, do you?”

“Not if I can help it. Now, please,” says Hannibal. “Enjoy.”

He doesn’t hear Will slurp the soup, but in his mind, Hannibal sees him eating it from the front of the spoon, sticking the entirety of the spoon’s bowl in his mouth rather than sipping quietly from the side. Thanks to his overactive imagination, Hannibal’s now thinking about Will’s mouth again, how it would feel on his skin as he sucked bruises into it; how Will’s tongue would feel flicking against his nipples, and the careful pressure of his teeth worrying the bud.

Will’s small moan after his first bite isn’t helping matters, at all. Hannibal knows without a doubt that being aroused at the dinner table is frowned upon--unless, of course, that was the intent of the meal from the beginning. And now Hannibal imagines Will taking bites from his fingers, lying in Hannibal’s lap, his head supported in the crook of Hannibal’s arm, expected to do nothing but chew and swallow and--

“This is amazing,” says Will through the door. “I mean. Really, really good.”

Hannibal takes a deep breath to control himself. His beast wants to simply knock down the door and beg to be ravished and claimed by the monster in Will. "I'm glad you like it," Hannibal manages, steadier than he feels.

"I don't think I'm going to be able to eat canned soup after this."

Another calming breath. "Excellent. It's hardly healthy."

"So, what am I going to do?" Will asks. "Wait on you to bring me soup?"

"I see nothing wrong with that." The Will sitting at Hannibal's elbow at the formal dinner table in his home in Baltimore shakes his head, smiling, and the rest of their soup is consumed in an easy silence.

"Jesus," says Will, and Hannibal pictures him unthinkingly rubbing his own stomach. "I think I'm already full."

Hannibal blinks, taken aback. "You don't eat much, do you?"

"Not..." Will sighs, and Hannibal chastises himself; the intent had not been to make Will feel ashamed. "Not like I should." Hannibal keeps himself from responding; he'd sound too much like a psychiatrist right now. Eventually, Will continues, "You can ask. I know you want to."

He closes his eyes, but still sees Will behind his eyelids. Hannibal simply can't escape him, not that he especially *wants* to. "Do you skip meals that were withheld from you in your youth?"

"Yeah." Will laughs bitterly. "Forced habits die hard. If Alana told you something about me, I'm guessing she mentioned that I was hospitalized for a very long time." He pauses, Hannibal assumes to choose his words carefully. "I was hardly an ideal patient. Some days I was fed. Some days I wasn't." It's so casual, the way he explains it, as if he didn't spend twenty years in enforced misery.

"We could talk for a while, instead," says Hannibal, attempting to return to the light-heartedness of the evening for the sake of them both. "If you need to wait to continue our meal, I am happy to do so."

"If you're sure you don't mind."

"I promise you, it's fine. The food will keep. Now," Hannibal says, "ask me something you want to know. Anything at all."

He hears Will's bare heel bouncing up and down on the floor. "Uh, let me think. How about your favorite book? Tell me about that."

"Dante's *Divine Comedy*," says Hannibal immediately.

"You would pick something ridiculous," Will replies, and he sounds like he's smiling again. Hannibal puts his palm against the door, like if he touches it long enough, his hand will pass

right through to wind around the back of Will's neck. He longs to kiss Will's smile; instead he settles for the feel of sturdy wood under his fingertips.

"Hardly ridiculous." He strokes his fingers down the door before letting his hand fall back to his lap. "It's a masterpiece. The greatest work of Italian literature."

"I bet you read it in Italian, didn't you? You sound like the kind of person who would prefer the original to translation."

"You would be correct."

"So what's the difference then? Or is it like trying to compare the two *Goldberg Variations* by Gould?"

Hannibal licks his lips. "A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa ."

Will's breathing picks up behind the door. "I have no idea what you just said, but I'd very much enjoy hearing more."

"'Here vigor failed the lofty fantasy,' or if you prefer, 'At this high moment, ability failed my capacity to describe.'"

"And is this a high moment?" Will asks.

Hannibal ducks his head slightly. "Very much so."

A long moment of silence from the other side of the door and then, "I think I'd like to try the next container."

"Are you certain?"

"No," Will admits, "I still don't feel hungry, but it wouldn't be the first time my stomach's lied to me. And I'm curious to see what else you've made."

He stares through the door again, pictures Will looking at Hannibal's table so that Hannibal can see his eyes safely. Will's flushed, from the Italian or the food or both--Hannibal's not sure. But he hears Will opening the second container; he'll have to analyze the Will in his head later.

"Macaroni and cheese?"

"Des macaronis au cinq fromages."

"So...macaroni and cheese," says Will, amused.

Hannibal huffs. "If you must." Will's fork crunches through the crispy crust, and Hannibal waits, wondering if he'll make the same sounds of satisfaction. But the only noise that comes is the same crush of the fork tines into the crust, each bite taken successively faster.

"Slow down, Will," Hannibal tells him, soft like he's halfheartedly scolding a child.

“It’s--” Will swallows. “I think this is the best mac and cheese I’ve ever had. How the hell are you still single?”

Hannibal outright snickers. He’s never done that before, except with Bedelia when he’s drunk. Then again, Hannibal feels a bit drunk now. “I find it difficult to make meaningful connections with others.”

“Because you’re perfect?” It’s rude, but Hannibal’s quickly realizing that there’s very little Will could do that he wouldn’t excuse and forgive.

“I don’t believe in perfection. The issue is finding compatibility. Finding an equal.”

“I don’t think you’re going to find that on my porch,” says Will.

“There is beauty to be discovered in the most unexpected places.”

Will says nothing, leaving Hannibal feeling suddenly bereft. He wants to be on the other side of the door so badly, to see Will enjoy what’s been made for him, the fruits of Hannibal’s labor, the overt gesture of his love.

“Do you feel like you could move on to the next course?” Hannibal asks, trying to distract himself from the sudden heartache at being so close, yet still out of reach. “If so, I will need to excuse myself back to the car.”

“Why’s that?”

“So you can collect your wine glass from the table,” he explains. “I also need to fetch the coffee for our dessert.”

“Oh my God, do you cook like this every day for your own meals?”

“Yes.”

“No wonder you’re soft,” teases Will. “And you’re apparently trying to remake me in your own image.”

Hannibal pushes the table and chair back to the side to let Will open the door. “We all have an inner gourmand,” he says. “All we must do is introduce ourselves to it.”

The rest of the meal goes much the same. Hannibal announces the main course--

“Magrets de canard avec pêches.”

“Looks like--” Will smells it. “Peaches and poultry?”

“Duck.”

“Why couldn’t you just say duck and peaches?”

--and tries to explain the bordeaux he’s paired with it--

“The 2012 Clos de l'Oratoire has hints of dark red cherries, mocha, and spice with a pure, slightly smoky long finish.”

“You’re going to try and turn me into a wine snob, too, aren’t you?”

--but it’s the dessert that proves to be the highlight of the meal. Hannibal had known it would go over well; he’s served the bittersweet chocolate pudding cakes before. To properly garnish them, Hannibal should have brought the slightly-sweetened Grand Marnier whipped cream, but there was no way to properly store it for the drive. Will doesn’t seem to care, and if he doesn’t stop being so vocally appreciative, Hannibal is going to have to excuse himself to his car for an entirely different reason.

“You were supposed to wait for the coffee,” Hannibal tells him.

“I was afraid my stomach would decide it was too full for dessert if I paused.”

“Given that you are unaccustomed to such meals, that choice was either very wise or incredibly short-sighted.” Hannibal sets the carafe and tumblers on his chair, and starts to move the table away from the door again.

“Wait,” says Will. “I...I mean, you could just put it through the hole in the door.” There’s a tremor in his voice.

“As you wish,” and Hannibal tries not to betray his own excitement, tries not to hope that he’ll be able to sit in the same room with Will any time in the near future. He pours the coffee, and waits for Will to remove the screen.

And now, here they stand, looking at each other’s mouths and noses and chins. Hannibal could reach out and touch him so easily, could put his hand through the partition and run the backs of his fingers down Will’s cheek. Instead, he holds his breath and presents Will with a white melamine cup.

Will doesn’t reach out to take it at first. Then, slowly, his hand inches toward the tumbler. When he accepts it, when both of their hands are holding the cup, Will runs the pad of his thumb over Hannibal’s.

“Hi,” says Will in a small voice.

Hannibal resumes breathing, each breath a spreading warmth in his chest. “Hello.”

“It’s *The Little Prince*.”

“What is?” asks Hannibal, voice just as low, afraid he’ll ruin this strange, sudden intimacy.

“My favorite book,” Will explains. “Quid pro quo. That makes it your turn again.”

Neither make a move away, just stand there, thumbs touching, nothing else in the known universe, the only real boundary between them simply words and words alone.

“So it does.”

Chapter End Notes

Quotes Used & Translations:

- "A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa." (Here vigor failed the lofty fantasy.) [At this high moment, ability failed my capacity to describe.]--Dante's *Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, Line 142 (Longfellow's translation, 1867) [Cary's translation, 1814]

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the delay! I have too many ideas and no self control with regards to writing them. Life offline got a bit too real this weekend, as well. But we're back!

I love you all and your wonderful comments. Raspberry scones for everyone. <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hannibal has never seen the road before. In all the myriad times he's visited this sanctuary over the course of his life, there has never been a road to see. Nevertheless, a long thin path stretches out across the dark meadow, a sinuous strand breaking through the tall, tall grass. He thinks it may lead into the forest, but Hannibal can no longer see the trees, only the shadows of branches, cutting through the sky-that-isn't like a scalpel slices through vellum.

The road begins at his toes and ends at his heels. Hannibal picks up his hooves and looks down, wondering if he is mistaken and has simply been standing in the middle of a continuous line. No packed brown dirt lies beneath him, only the smooth dark earth of his memory. Curiosity piqued, he alights and steps forward.

Hannibal watches the grass wither and die around him as he walks. Water begins to evaporate from the ground; it surrounds him in a dense fog. The farther he walks, the further it dissipates, first to mist, and then to a humid haze, and finally to nothing, at all. Black soil gives way to black sand, but the road never changes.

There's more nothing here than he's never seen before. It stretches on and in and out and up, so much nothing that he almost can't taste it. Hannibal certainly can't smell it, more so than usual. But he sees the Nothing--and that's what it is, now, he realizes, more principle and less practice--and Nothing is far more real than he could ever dream of being. He wonders if the Something follows close behind, or if it lives only in the trees.

At some point between nowhere and Nowhere, Hannibal starts to consider what it might be that he seeks. He never felt the need to leave the meadow before. Then again, there had never been a reason to go, no path to wander onto, no map for getting lost.

Perhaps, posits the Nothing, you are on your way to Somewhere.

And what will I do when I arrive?

Something, I suppose.

And that will be the end?

*Nothing shrugs; the breeze shifts the shape of the distant dunes. I suppose that is up to you.
Will you be defined by a shapeless concept, or will you conceptualize the shape?*

Both options have their benefits, says Hannibal.

They often do.

Hannibal walks in silence for a long time, and when had there become a silence here in his dreams, anyway? Before the road, there had always been the absence of sound, but never silence.

When, indeed? the Nothing says.

Is that what I search for? Do I look for When?

Nothing frowns. You ask a lot of questions. Therein may lie the answer.

Hannibal blinks awake in his favorite armchair in the kitchen. He rubs at his eyes before looking at the clock, discovering that he still has a few hours before his alarm goes off.

The stairs seem steeper than usual, but it's been a long day. Dinner with Will had been a spectacular success, though the long drive home left much to be desired. His legs are still cramping from spending more time in the car than he is accustomed to. Hannibal remembers coming home and tidying up, then sitting down with his tablet and a glass of his favorite malbec--which, hopefully, he finished and isn't leaving to die downstairs--and then nothing.

It's unlike him to fall asleep so suddenly; Hannibal can hear his inner Bedelia calling him old, much to his annoyance. Still, he's too happy and warm from his visit with Will to complain, though he does wish Will had replied to his text telling him that he was safely home, as Will had requested. There's always tomorrow.

Well. Later today, he supposes.

The usual morning crowd of students and business persons has drifted through. Hannibal doesn't mind the curtiness of the suits and briefcases; their coffees are always easy orders, so they come and go quickly. The students, on the other hand, tend to ask for whatever is on special, or for a surprise. They loiter, asking about his outfit, discussing their studies, explaining social media and gaming. Hannibal loves it; the intellectual conversations remind him much of a traditional salon. Considering that he, too, runs a coffeehouse, Hannibal feels like he is contributing to the maintenance of a historical tradition.

So far this morning, Hannibal has explained Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" to a group of confused freshmen, held a conversation with a French major, and discussed the ethics of euthanasia with a med school applicant. By the time everyone has filtered out, Hannibal feels refreshed and calm and collected. It will be a few hours until the lunch patrons begin to arrive, so he busies himself with straightening the shop.

The ringing of the bell on the door, therefore, is a complete surprise.

Hannibal looks up from where he's been refilling the raw sugar shaker. His visitor is a young woman with long red hair under a scarlet and gold striped beanie with some unidentifiable crest on the front. She has a matching scarf wound around her neck, a blue hoodie, corduroy pants, and a scowl.

"May I help you, miss?"

"We need to talk," says the stranger.

Hannibal frowns. "Please," he says, gesturing to the nearest table, "have a seat."

She does, setting her messenger bag on the floor next to her chair with an unceremonious *thump*. Hannibal looks at it like he would an unaccompanied child--confused, dismayed, and irritated. It sounds and looks like it's full of bricks, all lumps and bulges, pushing out the numerous enamel and metal pins attached to the top flap. He sits down, belatedly realizing he hasn't offered her a drink.

"Charlie Bradbury," she says, thrusting one hand across the table in an offer to shake, the other unzipping her hoodie.

Hannibal takes her hand. "Hannibal Lecter. The pleasure is mine."

Charlie nods tightly. "So I'm here to discuss your store hours, because the app is getting clogged with the insane number of third-party updates."

"I...I beg your pardon?"

She blinks in disbelief. "You don't know about the app? The app for your shop?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Hold on, just a sec." Charlie leans over and rummages around in her bag. Soon, the table holds two old laptops, a pencil case made entirely of zippers, a dog-eared copy of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*--and Hannibal makes a face at that; no book should have to suffer so--and Beverly Katz' wallet, her driver's license in the outer plastic pocket.

"You know Beverly?" Hannibal asks.

Charlie glances up from her search and smiles. "Yeah. Bev's my girlfriend. Left her wallet on my kitchen counter this morning."

"I thought Beverly was dating someone named Dany."

“You know nothing, Jon Snow.” Charlie finally sits back up, iPhone in hand. “So I made an app,” she says, opening it and leaning sideways across the table to show Hannibal, “that people can update to let others know when you’re actually open.”

“‘Whisked Is Away’?”

“Yeah,” she says. “You often are. I mean, seriously. If I have to make an app so that people can get an alert if you’re closed, you might operate a store with seriously weird hours.” Charlie pauses, then adds, “Which, by the way, you do. This is the first time I’ve ever been here when you’re actually open.”

“Then how--”

“You know when Beverly buys those triple espressos? Those are for me.” She looks sheepish before saying, “And I might steal bites of her scones when she isn’t looking.”

“I see. Well, Miss Bradbury, I don’t--”

“It’s actually *Mx.* Bradbury.”

Hannibal closes his eyes in annoyance. “If you would be so kind as to stop interrupting,” he says, then clears his throat. “*Mx.* Bradbury.”

She looks properly chastised. “Sorry.”

“Apology accepted,” says Hannibal with a slight nod. “Now, I do not consider myself a business owner, per se,” explains Hannibal. “Whisked Away is my hobby. It honestly never occurred to me that treating it as such might prove inconvenient.”

Charlie stares at him. “This goes *way* beyond inconvenient. Look, I even added a chat function so that customers could brag when they actually manage to be here at the right time. Your front door might as well be a closet to Narnia. A mythical coffee shop. Terry Pratchett would be proud.”

“I’m afraid I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“The point *is*,” Charlie says, “that we need you to pin down some kind of an approximate schedule. The townsfolk are ready to riot, especially now that you’re completely closed on the weekends.”

Hannibal sighs, completely perplexed. “It was never my intention to be so obscenely rude. Would you please let your app patrons know that I apologize?”

“If you’ll just give us an idea or a warning or anything--”

“What about a complimentary cookie?”

Charlie raises her eyebrows. “Like, show you the app, you feed us sugar?”

“It would be mutually beneficial,” says Hannibal, smiling. “I find myself in need of taste testers; you all find yourselves in need of placating.”

“*Ohhhh*, yeah, Bev said you were conspiring to fatten Will up.” Charlie winks at him. “He really, really likes you, by the way. You’re totes the Riker to his Troi. Imzadi.”

“Yes,” and Hannibal still has absolutely no clue what she’s talking about. “You know Will?”

“Know *of* him, at least. Beverly talks about him.” Charlie shrugs. “She and Lana both think I’d be a little too much for Will to handle. Which, to be fair, they’re probably right.”

“Undoubtedly,” Hannibal agrees. “No offense, of course.”

“Oh, none taken. I can be kinda intense.” She grins; Hannibal can see why Beverly is so enamored. Charlie’s smile is infectious. “Okay, so how about this? You do the free cookie thing on...I dunno, Tuesdays and Thursdays. That way you can test stuff in plenty of time to get a batch to Will.” She jabs at his arm with both pointer fingers; he stares down at it, not quite knowing how to react. “We still need to figure out a way to update all of the Whiskers when--”

“Whiskers?”

Charlie laughs. “That’s what we’ve taken to calling ourselves. Anyway, we need to know when you’re going to spontaneously change your hours, y’know? But I don’t want to give you admin access, because then you’re going to get, like, sixty some-odd people clamoring for your attention.”

“You could give me your number,” suggests Hannibal. “If I know in advance of closing that I will be doing so, I would give you advance notice.”

“And then I can pin an admin update to the board.” She claps and then rubs her hands together. “Perfect!”

Charlie holds up her hand for a high five. Hannibal raises his palm and tentatively meets hers, and Charlie’s face lights up like she’s won a prize.

“What?”

“Beverly told me you wouldn’t give me a high five,” Charlie tells him. “She owes me a *Lord of the Rings* marathon.”

By the time Charlie left an hour-and-a-half later, Hannibal had learned more about pop culture than he ever cared to know. She invited him to come sit in on one of her computer science lectures--

“We’re going to be comparing and contrasting the Roman Forum with Reddit,” she said. “It’s gonna be *wild*.”

“I’m afraid I no longer go in for ‘wild’,” replied Hannibal, “but thank you for the invitation.”

--which Beverly finds hilarious. She’s sitting at the counter now, waiting on her scones to warm up, laughing so hard that she can’t drink her tea.

“She’ll have you drawing Spirk fanart soon if you aren’t careful.”

Hannibal looks horrified. “Do I even want to know what a spirk is?”

Beverly snorts. “Probably not. But seriously, let’s stop talking about Dany for two seconds and talk about your date last night.”

“I thought it went very well,” says Hannibal, checking on the scones. “The plan is to make it a standing appointment.”

“Well doesn’t that sound all official.” Beverly eyes him over her cup as she takes a sip. “Very romantic,” she says after swallowing, “‘standing appointment’.”

Hannibal curls his lip. “I believe the intimacy of such encounters are not your business, Miss Katz.”

“They are when half of the encounter calls me after ten o’clock to dish about his hot date.” Beverly puts her cup down on the saucer and scoots them both to the side. She folds her arms on top of the counter and leans in conspiratorially. “You want to know what he said?”

“That’s hardly appropriate,” Hannibal says, even though he’d rather pull out his sketch pad and grill her for every detail so as to record it for posterity. “I doubt he gave you permission to share his words.”

Beverly leans back, sighing. “You’re no fun.”

“Besides,” he continues, “Will has yet to text me back. It isn’t my volley, nevermind that I would never ask to be made privy to his private conversations.”

“You texted him last night? Whatever happened to waiting three days before calling?”

“Etiquette has changed, for one. More importantly, Will asked me to let him know that I made it home safely.” Hannibal pulls the scones out and slides them from the pan onto a plate. “I did.”

“And?”

He averts his eyes back to the pan. It has an extremely interesting tarnished spot. “And I never heard back, so I went on to bed.”

“Oh my God,” says Beverly, ignoring the piping hot scones and excitedly drumming her fingers on the countertop. “You waited up by the phone first, didn’t you?”

“I--”

“You *did!*”

Hannibal turns away to put the pan on the stovetop to cool. “I may have been under the impression he would respond.”

Beverly stops snickering abruptly. “Shit.”

He winces slightly. “Language, Beverly.”

She makes a face back at him. “No, look, he didn’t text you back because he was on the phone with me telling me how *amazing* you are and how you’re such a *gentleman* and how *over the damn moon he is* about you and then he asked me how to take care of his stomach ache.”

“Did he take ill?”

“Only because somebody cooks too well,” Beverly says pointedly before taking an enormous bite out of a scone.

Hannibal hangs his oven mitts back on their proper peg. He feels slightly sick now, himself. “I told him it was alright for us to conclude the meal after the first course.”

“That was still really hot, *ow*. ”

“My cooking has never made anyone ill before,” he says, Beverly’s burned tongue going unnoticed. “At least, not to my knowledge.”

Beverly sets down the other half of the scone and reaches for her tea again. “It’s not your fault, Hannibal. Besides, he said it was the best meal he’s ever had in his entire life.”

He stands there for a moment, feeling lost. Even without intending to, he’s already managed to hurt Will. Hannibal should have insisted they stop the meal and talk for the rest of the evening, but Will seemed so *pleased*. But he should have known better than to fix so much rich food, especially considering Will’s typical grocery list. He should have introduced cuisine more slowly, should have anticipated Will overcompensating for a lifetime of horrible eating, should have--

Beverly’s hands fold over his; Hannibal hadn’t even noticed they were shaking. “Hannibal,” she says gently. “It’s not your fault, big guy. Hey, Lana?”

Hannibal hadn’t heard the bell on the door, either, but there is Alana, just over Beverly’s shoulder, in her toggle coat and cloche cap, hanging her umbrella off the counter by its hook handle. “Is Hannibal okay?” she asks.

“Yeah, he just thinks Will’s upset tummy is the end of the world.” Beverly looks at Alana knowingly and squeezes Hannibal’s hands. “Tell him it’s not his fault.”

“Of *course* it isn’t your fault. We all tend to overeat when your cooking’s involved. Nature of the beast. Our inability to moderate ourselves isn’t on you.” Alana grins. “You know, Hannibal, if you’re concerned, you could text him. Or call, even.”

“I apologize,” he says after taking a deep breath, though he makes no move to shake off Beverly’s hands. “I am typically not so...over-dramatic.”

“Oh yes, you are,” Beverly tells him. “You just have a really good excuse for it now.”

“Don’t tell him that,” says Alana, sliding into her usual spot at the counter. “He’ll only take it as license to be worse than he already is.”

“I am not required to fix your lunch, Miss Bloom,” Hannibal says levelly. He does not, however, deny her supposition.

Chapter End Notes

As I have said elsewhere, I am contractually obligated to include Charlie Bradbury in as many fanfics as possible. No worries, there will be no Winchesters in this story (though I am convinced that Chilton is somehow related to them, given his ridiculous rate of survival).

Also, many thanks to betts for leaving headcanons about the Whisked Away app in the beta notes for previous chapters. It was too good to not make canon.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

I'm still four chapters behind on answering comments, but plodding along as I can. You all remain the best. <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

At Alana and Beverly's behest, Hannibal finally sends Will a text. He's uncertain as to why he is so hesitant to send it, though the memory of waiting by the phone the night before is still fresh, not to mention embarrassing. Hannibal isn't used to behaving like a besotted teenager, not anymore, at least. But it was apparent that they weren't going to leave until the text was sent, so sent it was.

Thursday evenings are typically slow, but Hannibal still refuses to check his phone during business hours. It's impolite to his customers, and gives off a bad impression for those newcomers who walk in. Charlie had encouraged him to download "Whisked Is Away" to his business iPad instead, since he uses a Lightning to SD card reader. He agreed with her; it's hardly improper to use a tool that will help him serve his customers more efficiently.

A few so-called Whiskers filter in that night looking for a free cookie. Luckily enough, Hannibal has spent the afternoon working on perfecting a recipe for lemon pizzelles. The thin wafer cookies go best with tea, particularly green tea, so Hannibal also offers each of them a complimentary cup of ceremonial quality matcha. He's offered tips for his effort; when his taste testers see that the jar is raising money to offset the cost of Mrs. Crawford's chemotherapy, Hannibal notices that most of them put in the full price of the cup of tea.

The Whiskers are happy for the free treat. Hannibal is happy for the opportunity to practice preparing matcha for his next visit with Will, not to mention the positive feedback on the pizzelles. Abigail will be happy to have raised money for her mother. All in all, a very successful evening.

As Hannibal is locking up, he hears his phone beep in his jacket pocket. He doesn't pull it out immediately, but he does pull it out quickly enough to nearly fumble and drop it on the tile.

W: Sorry for not texting you back last night. Lana texted me to tell me it was rude. I'm not great at this whole talking conversationally on the phone thing, but I'll try to get better.

H: Quite alright, though I was worried until Beverly told me you two were on the phone.

W: I really enjoyed having dinner with you and wanted to share it.

W: How much fun it was, not the dinner, obviously.

W: I probably didn't need to qualify that.

H: Again, quite alright. May I text you after dinner? I am currently closing up the shop.

W: What time?

H: Nine o'clock?

W: Gonna tell me a bedtime story?

H: If you like.

W: Haha. Talk to you then.

Hannibal goes exactly five miles over the speed limit. There's no need to draw attention to himself. Being in love is not illegal, but speeding is, and being pulled over will keep him from speaking with Will and--

Okay, perhaps he is a besotted teenager, after all. He sighs, knowing how much fun Bedelia will have with this information on Saturday. It isn't as if he could keep the juicy details away from his best friend, even if he wanted to. She does *so* love to humiliate him, and Hannibal is, as always, amenable.

For now, though, he only has to survive a conversation with Will.

Hannibal cleans up the kitchen as he cooks, so all there is to do following dinner is to wash the dishes. There are no leftovers to box up, because he doesn't believe in them, though Hannibal did considering making an extra portion to send with Beverly on Saturday. Alongside the lemon pizzelles he'll be baking. And maybe a batch of tomato soup.

He checks the clock and decides he has just enough time for a quick shower before Will texts. Hannibal chooses the chamomile and honey soap he reserves for relaxation on nights he anticipates trouble sleeping. Just as it has for every shower he's taken the past two weeks, Hannibal's mind wanders to Will. He can't help himself--Hannibal's never wanted to take care of someone like he wants to look after Will, not once.

Every pass of the soap, of the lather is one that he could smooth over Will's skin, instead, a reason to hear Will sigh softly, to feel each muscle relax beneath his touch. He could bury his nose in Will's hair, freshly washed, his scalp tingling from the peppermint in the shampoo. Hannibal could kiss his way down clean skin, lick and suck and bite. I would be so easy to gently tilt Will's head to the side and taste his lips, his mouth, his tongue.

He has an entirely different problem now, one that he wants ample time to take care of, so Hannibal grits his teeth and turns on the cold water.

His phone beeps from where he's left it on the shelf outside the door. Hannibal's turned off the water, stepped out of the shower, and wrapped himself in his robe in a matter of seconds. He'll take the time to consider the small miracle of him not slipping on the floor later.

W: 9pm. Hello.

H: My clock reads 8:58, but it's hardly an issue.

W: I suppose I could text at 9:02 next time.

H: Or at precisely nine.

W: Are you always this persnickety or am I a special case?

H: Are you fishing for compliments?

W: Bev does say I'm a decent fisherman.

H: May I call you?

But Will beats him to it, and Hannibal knows he's being too eager, but he picks up after the first ring, just as he sits back into the deep, padded cushions of the armless slipper chair.

"Miss me, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal looks across from him toward the matching chair. He thinks to place Will there, but realizes he would still be unable to look at his face. "I did," says Hannibal, getting back up to look for a better spot to sit in. "Very much so."

"I told Bev last night that I wished you could've stayed longer," and Hannibal can feel his own face warm in sympathy. "If that makes you feel better," Will adds.

"Yes," says Hannibal, and his mouth is starting to hurt from smiling, and he feels ridiculous and wonderful all at once. "What else did you say to Beverly?"

"Now who's fishing?"

Hannibal finally stops wandering around the room, settling on the end of his bed. "Fair enough." He looks around for his pajama pants; he usually leaves a fresh pair sitting out on the bed before he leaves every morning. "How was your day?"

"Um." Will chuckles nervously. "Maybe you first?"

"Of course," says Hannibal, "let me locate my pajamas and then--" Hannibal stops and immediately reviews what he's said. "That sounds inappropriate. It was just that I was in the shower when you texted and--"

The nervous edge to Will's laughter is gone; apparently, it isn't only Bedelia who enjoys a flustered Hannibal. "I thought you'd at least wait until after the third date to call me in a towel."

“My apologies.”

“Oh, none needed. I’m, uh…” He clears his throat. “I’m ready for bed, too, so no harm, no foul.”

“Ah.” Hannibal gives up the search and opts to pull another pair of pajamas out of the drawer. “Is it alright if I put you on speakerphone? The shoulder-to-ear technique seems to be failing.”

“Go for it,” and Hannibal does. “Tell me about your day while you’re getting dressed?” Will asks.

“It was a fairly normal breakfast,” Hannibal says, setting the phone down on top of the dresser. “I had some very enlightening conversations with the students from UB.”

“For you or for them?”

Hannibal considers this as he steps into his pajama pants. “I like to think it goes both ways. That I learn as much from them as they do from me. They certainly do keep me…grounded.”

Will groans on the other end of the phone. “Grounded.”

“Yes.”

“You run a coffee shop.”

“I had noticed, believe it or not.”

“Are you a pun guy?” asks Will. “Don’t tell me you’re a pun guy.”

“Bedelia often tells me,” says Hannibal, tying the drawstring, “that puns are the lowest form of wit.”

“And what does she say after?”

“That if I’m going to insist on staying on the floor, that the least I could do is stay at her feet.”

“Wow.” A shifting of fabric on the other end of the line, and Hannibal pictures Will moving his head on a pillow, getting comfortable. “She sounds like a piece of work.”

“I think you two would get along nicely.”

“Would I have to sit on my knees for her to like me?” His smirk is audible.

“While she would no doubt enjoy it,” Hannibal tells him as he buttons his shirt, “I’m certain it would not be necessary.”

“So, let’s see.” Hannibal hears movement again, and wonders what is causing Will’s discomfort. “You hold forums for breakfast, enjoy puns--regrettably, I might add--and

Bedelia is and will continue to be a driving force in your life.”

“You would be correct on all three counts.”

Will *hmm*s, then says, “I think I can live with that. Sounds a lot more exciting than my life, that’s for sure. So what else?”

“I made the acquaintance of one Charlie Bradbury this morning.”

“Oh, yeah, Beverly’s girl. I’ve chatted with her on Telegram a few times.”

“Telegram?” asks Hannibal, settling himself into the pillows propped against the headboard of his bed, the phone resting on his thigh.

“It’s like, uh, texting on the internet.”

“I see,” though he doesn’t really, but imagines Alana will happily explain to him at lunch tomorrow.

“What did Charlie come in for?”

“Apparently there is an app crafted solely to keep track of my hours of business.”

Will barks a laugh. “Of course there is.”

“After that, Alana and Beverly came in for lunch, along with the other usual patrons. The rest of the day was fairly straightforward and uneventful.” Hannibal picks at one of the covered buttons on his pajama shirt. “How about your own day?”

“Well,” Will begins, “I made it out on the porch today.”

“You did yesterday, as well.”

“Only long enough to give you somewhere to sit and eat,” he explains. “I didn’t exactly sit and watch the birds.”

Hannibal closes his eyes. It isn’t that the conversation is painful, but he can hear the note of self-recrimination in Will’s voice, and that *does* hurt. He’s only too aware of how his personal desire to look after Will could easily come off as patronizing, or worse, *fatherly*. The fact remains that Hannibal wants to soothe the pain. There’s really no way to do that without sounding like a psychoanalyst so, for now, all he can do is let his actions speak for themselves.

“But you did today?” Hannibal asks, eyes still closed. He’s unsure why, but he places his hand on the bed palm up.

“Not precisely. I keep bat boxes near the house. They eat all the bugs, so the birds tend to stay out in the woods.”

“Bats?”

“Oh, yeah, they get a bad rap,” says Will. “Also they’re fun to watch at night. Get a blanket, lie out in the field--”

Hannibal swears he feels a hand in his, doesn’t dare open his eyes to ruin the illusion. “I didn’t pay particular attention but--I’m sorry, Will, it was not my intention to interrupt.”

“No, no, no, it’s fine, really. Go on.”

“I didn’t think to look up at the sky last night, but I imagine the stars are lovely out there, away from the city.”

“God, Hannibal, you have no idea. It’s beautiful. Anyway, you just lie out there and look up and...” Will exhales breathily, as if he’s awed by even the idea of it. “It sounds so cliché, but you get a full moon and just--just really *look*, you know? And sometimes you’ll swear that it’s looking back. You can hear the bats squeaking back and forth at each other; if you practice, if you listen long enough, you can catch sight of them as they pass through the light. Or even nights that you can’t, when there’s no moon and all you’ve got is the noise of them finding each other--what is it, echolalia? That doesn’t sound right.”

“Echolocation?”

Will snaps his fingers. “That’s the one. You listen to them find their family, sing and sing and sing, better than any summer cicada. It’s music, and the sky’s this endless blue-black with little pinpricks of light bleeding through, like we’re all under glass and the universe is only poking through the other side.” He sighs contentedly. “Beautiful.”

Hannibal squeezes his hand into a fist, belatedly realizing that there’s no hand there to squeeze back. “You’re something of a poet.”

“Nah,” says Will. “That’s nature’s job. I just watch when I can make it out beyond my porch.”

“You should consider writing down your insights.” Hannibal grins, thinking about Will scribbling in a journal, waxing philosophic about the night. “What do you do when the sun is out?”

“You mean when I sat on my porch today?”

“Yes.”

“Well,” and Will trails off momentarily, makes a small pained noise.

“Are you alright, Will?” Hannibal runs his thumb over nothing, trying to comfort the air, he supposes.

“Yeah, it’s nothing. Anyway, today I spent washing the dogs.”

“I had meant to ask after them.” It isn’t that Hannibal particularly *likes* dogs, but he doesn’t necessarily *dislike* them, either. What he *does* like is Will; therefore, he is immensely interested in dogs as of approximately two weeks ago. “They were very...absent yesterday.”

Will snickers. "I told them to get lost for a few hours."

"Do your dogs always appear and disappear at your will?"

"They're good dogs. And they know where home is."

"You mean they know where their pack leader is," says Hannibal.

"Don't let them hear you," and he tries to hide another barely-audible wince, "might offend them, not being top dog. Especially Buster. He's very sensitive."

"I'll keep that in mind. Will?"

"Mmhmm?"

Hannibal tries to grip the hand that doesn't exist again, tells himself that it doesn't matter how far he turns his head to the left, that Will isn't going to be sitting there next to him. So he simply says, "Tell me what's ailing you, please."

"I...I don't want to hurt your feelings. But..." He exhales heavily. "You were right last night. I was incredibly short-sighted."

"It doesn't hurt my feelings," Hannibal assures him. "Beverly mentioned you were having some stomach trouble."

"I tried walking it off, you know, like you're supposed to for overindulgence. I was having a bad leg day; hurt too much. Left my cane in Lana's car and Bev keeps forgetting to grab it to bring back and I didn't want to wear my walker boots today." Will sounds disgusted, almost snarling.

"Walker boots?" asks Hannibal, though he already has prior knowledge. He'd hoped to have been wrong in his assessment, his assumption, but Hannibal had also seen the diagrams in medical journals. Still, Hannibal promised to let Will speak for himself, and he never breaks a promise.

"Yeah." He can hear Will breathing through his teeth. "There were a lot of broken bones in my childhood. Mostly my legs. And the muscles, well, they're kind of shit at this point."

"Because of the frequent fractures?"

"Among...other things. I wasn't able to be super mobile for a long time."

Hannibal's heart is in his throat, and there's absolutely nothing he can do or say to dislodge it. Licking his lips, Hannibal lets the silence draw on for several moments while he considers what he *can* say. "I do not believe in sympathy. It is disingenuous to the person being given it," he explains, "and does nothing to alleviate their unfortunate circumstance. Sympathetic words and actions further victimizes, and I don't see you as weak or in need of rescue."

Will quietly asks, "What *do* you believe in?"

“Compassion. Understanding, when deserved. Mercy, when earned. A listening ear, always.”

Hannibal hears one, lone snuffle on the other end of the call. “Thank you,” says Will, and it sounds genuine. “I appreciate your honesty. Also your lack of sympathy,” and he laughs a little. “I hate it when people feel sorry for me. This is my life. This is what I get, you know? Can’t change the past.”

“Indeed, we can’t.” Hannibal pauses, walking back through the conversation. “Why do you not like the walker boots?”

“I don’t like feeling restrained, and they feel like restraints.”

Hannibal gives up on maintaining the illusion of Will’s presence and finally opens his eyes. Yet there is Will, clear as day, sitting at the end of the bed, facing him. He looks at Will in something akin to disbelief; Hannibal moves his foot against Will’s, but it passes through, and the phantom finally fades.

Nothing has ever piqued Hannibal’s curiosity like this. He’s completely uncertain as to whether what he sees is merely an unusually strong figment of his imagination, or possibly some form of astral or psychic projection. Neither are concepts that Hannibal has ever given weight to, but he’s open to reconsidering when evidence stares at him in his own bedroom.

Hannibal wants to ask, but this isn’t the moment to do it in. He needs to wait, to see if the phenomenon continues. Will wanted time, and time he shall have in this, as well.

So he finally says, “I see. Would you care to talk about your stomach again?”

“Yes,” says Will, sounding relieved. “You’re terrific, you know that?” And *oh*, Hannibal feels the hand in his now, real and not at the same time. “Just terrific.”

“What else did you try?” asks Hannibal, his own hand trembling. “Since taking a long walk was not an option.”

“Water,” Will replies. “I had a box of peppermint tea Beverly brought me on a whim like two Christmases ago, but I made some and it was fucking awful.”

Hannibal wrinkles his nose. “I can only imagine. Have you tried massaging your abdomen?”

“Dr. Lecter, are you asking me if I’ve rubbed my tummy?”

“Well--”

“Do I need to pat my head, too?”

Hannibal glares at the spot on the bed where he’d seen Will, and Will outright *giggles*.

“Sorry,” says Will as he calms down. “I was just thinking about what you must look like when you’re disgruntled.”

“Strangely enough, I was imagining what *you* must look like when you’re putting that look on my face.” His hand tingles, a pleasant discharge of static. “I was being serious. Rubbing your stomach in a clockwise motion can aid in digestion, as can lying on your left side. Although...”

“What?”

“Well,” Hannibal starts, “when massaging the stomach, it is best to lie on your back with a pillow under your knees to help relax the torso.” He smirks to himself and adds, “Better still to let someone else perform the massage.”

Will stifles a noise that sounds suspiciously like a moan, and it goes straight to Hannibal’s cock. He tries to ignore it. “That seems...” Will exhales slowly through his nose. “Intimate.”

“It can be.” Hannibal shifts on the bed. “But there are suitable alternatives, of course. An infusion of fennel in mint tea can also help soothe a stomach ache. As can ginger ale, for which I have a recipe.”

“Of course you do,” says Will. “I don’t know, though, that, uh, stomach massage? That really sounds like the best option. Um.” Will makes a series of noncommittal noises. “I--I don’t suppose you make house calls, do you, doctor?”

Hannibal is going to stop breathing at this rate. “Not usually, but I imagine I could be persuaded to make an exception.”

“You busy on Sunday?”

“My schedule is open.” Hannibal feels the electric charge traveling up his arm.

“Can I make an appointment?”

“You’re very forward, Mr. Graham,” says Hannibal.

But Will disagrees. “Only when no one’s looking.”

“Then I will do my utmost not to look,” Hannibal replies. He’s never wanted to chuckle while aroused; it’s a singularly strange experience. “Should I bring lunch?”

“Won’t that exacerbate the problem?”

“You should trust your physician. And I’ll bring something much lighter than I did yesterday.”

“Oh, don’t bother amending your culinary flair on my account,” says Will. “I can manage. Besides, I’ll have you to take care of me, won’t I?”

Hannibal swallows a moan of his own. He turns his head, buries his face in Will’s curls. “Yes,” he says softly. “Yes, you will.”

Chapter End Notes

I've got a [longfic](#) finishing up on Tuesday and will also be posting a few drabbles and ficlets for [#EatTheRare](#), so why don't we meet up here at the same time next week? :D

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your patience! [#EatTheRare](#) ate me for a week, and then the toddler and I caught whatever horrendous virus is currently making the rounds. I hope you find this worth the wait. <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The drive to Will's house seems shorter this time, but Hannibal knows how easily the mind plays tricks. Typically, though, the phenomenon occurs going the opposite direction, toward home; it's known in the psychological community as the return trip effect for a reason. Optimism is high when the driver sets out, until the trip takes longer than they expect, whether from unknown causes or that ever-present enemy of the mind: boredom. Naturally, they assume the drive back will be excruciating; instead, it feels shorter, because the path is now known.

That diagnosis doesn't fit Hannibal's current situation, however. He's been down these back country roads before, but at a different time of day. The landscape is familiar enough, but to Hannibal, it's like looking at a copy of a photograph--the picture is the same, but it's still obvious that it isn't the original. Hannibal doesn't let the feeling bother him. He's anticipating the visit too much to be rattled by a commonly known and universally experienced traveler's condition.

Wolf Trap is infinitely more beautiful during the daylight, regardless of how long the drive takes. Alana's so-called flat and muddy fields look positively fertile under the midday sun. The forest that runs alongside the road is dark, cool, and inviting. Hannibal's first thought is of walking through it with Will. His imagination helpfully conjures up the vision of a feral, wild Will that slinks around Hannibal's brain on a perpetual prowl.

He indulges himself, lets the Will from his mind come to life out in the forest. Will darts and weaves around the tall trunks of orange-leaved trees. His hair is longer and flows behind him, curls dancing as he slices through the air. Hannibal tears his eyes away from the woods and back to the road, retracts his claws back into memory at the sight of his human fingers on the steering wheel. He makes the fangs dissolve in his mouth, tasting blood on his tongue. The antlers fade on their own; his hoofs shift back into feet.

How easily the mind plays tricks, indeed.

The remainder of the drive goes by quickly, quietly, and without incident, though Hannibal can't shake the feeling of being watched from the trees. That slight unease dissipates when he pulls within sight of Will's porch, and there sits Will. As Hannibal parks, Will throws up his hand in a friendly wave, though he doesn't otherwise look up from whatever it is that he's

doing. Hannibal begins to wave back, then realizes that Will won't see it, and feels somewhat stupid.

"Let me know when it's safe to look," Will calls out from the porch, Hannibal closing the driver's side door and pulling his bag from the backseat. "Oh. And hello, obviously."

Hannibal smiles to himself; he doesn't mean to do more than tick up the corner of his mouth, but he catches his reflection in the window as he shuts the back door. A few weeks ago, he would be surprised at giving himself away, even if only *to* himself; after Will, he isn't the same self.

"I'm turning around and walking to the porch," Hannibal tells him, and he does.

Will is dressed similarly to how he was the Sunday he came into Whisked Away, except neater, cleaner. His jeans aren't new--there's some wear and tear at the bottom hem--but they've been ironed, a sharp crease running from knee to ankle as Will sits on the stoop. He's not wearing sneakers today; Hannibal is touched to see that Will's opted to put on the walker boots. It means he's in pain, but he chose not to cancel, that Will wanted to see Hannibal *that much*--

Hannibal tries to stop smiling, but he can't, so he focuses on Will's hands, instead.

"I didn't know that you knit," he observes.

"You stay a shut-in long enough," says Will, "you develop all kinds of interesting hobbies."

Hannibal sets his bag down on the porch, then sits next to Will on the steps. His suit pants can be dry-cleaned. "Such as?"

"Well, knitting, for starters."

"What else?"

Will huffs a laugh. "I thought this was quid pro quo."

"True enough." Hannibal thrills a little when Will's arm brushes up against his, green jacket rubbing against his wool overcoat. "You know I draw, of course. But I also compose."

"Oh yeah?" Will's hands and the even, perfect stitches he effortlessly makes are mesmerizing. It looks like he's making a scalloped edge, though for what, Hannibal couldn't possibly say. "What instrument?"

"Harpsichord."

Will's hands pause. "You have got to be kidding me."

"I am not." Hannibal links his hands in front of him, elbows on his knees. "Perhaps, sometime, you could come over, and I could play for you."

“Is that the 17th century equivalent of Netflix and chill?” There’s a distinct note of flirtation in Will’s voice.

Hannibal isn’t sure what is appropriate to say--he is still courting Will; their conversation Thursday evening very nearly crossed into impropriety--but decides to be honest. “Should you like it to be.” Not knowing where to look now that Will has stopped knitting, Hannibal settles on Will’s feet. His socks are hand-knitted, a lovely shade of green to match his jacket.

“I wish I could ask you to look at me,” says Will.

“I can keep my eyes closed,” Hannibal suggests. “Perhaps, afterward, you would return the favor.”

Will’s breathing grows heavy. “Let me see you,” he finally whispers, and Hannibal raises his head, eyes shut, face as relaxed as he can manage.

It takes every iota of Hannibal’s cultivated control not to startle at Will’s unexpected touch. His fingers are calloused but gentle as he strokes Hannibal’s cheek, feeling every inch like he’s trying to memorize it. Will’s hands travel, touching Hannibal’s brow, down his jawline, up to his ears, even over Hannibal’s nose. When Will traces his lips, Hannibal struggles to breathe. He wants to run his tongue over Will’s fingertips, suck them into his mouth, listen to Will moan, catalogue every pitch, every note. Still, he refrains, even though it hurts.

“God, Hannibal. You’re so beautiful.”

“I don’t know what to say.” That’s starting to be a common reaction where Will is involved.

Will wraps his hand around the back of Hannibal’s neck; his fingers caress him. A groan strangles itself to death in Hannibal’s throat. “Say you are,” Will tells him.

“You sound a bit like Bedelia right now.” Hannibal pauses before letting Will know, “That’s a compliment, of course.”

“Don’t worry; I took it as one.” A moment more, and then Will withdraws. “I hope it wasn’t insulting or...something I should have asked about first. It just felt natural to do.”

“I welcome your touch. May I return the favor?”

Will sighs. “Would you forgive me for saying no? I...” He hesitates. Hannibal waits for him to continue, but Will doesn’t. He can guess why Will wants to stop, though.

“Too overwhelming?” Hannibal asks.

“It’s...Touching your hand the other day is the most physical human contact I’ve had aside from yearly physicals in a long, long time.” Will chuckles, but not wryly. Hannibal’s glad his hesitation was due to composing his words and not to embarrassment. “I had hoped to have the opportunity to, though opening the door wasn’t an option.”

“Later, perhaps?” Hannibal lets himself grin, lets his eyebrow arch suggestively.

“Let’s just say,” Will begins, “that I don’t believe you understand moderation when it comes to meals.”

Hannibal’s somewhat confused by that, but doesn’t press. “Shall we move on to lunch, then?”

He hears Will set down his knitting; the wooden needles click against the porch stair. “You okay with eating outside?” asks Will. “I know it’s a little chilly, but it’s a beautiful day and I’ve not been out much.”

“Do you still feel uncomfortable with inviting me in?”

“Not anymore. At least, I don’t right now. But I want to enjoy the sunshine with you. That’s all.”

Hannibal turns to his bag before opening his eyes. He pulls out his favorite stainless steel carafe and tumblers first, setting them down between himself and Will before gently removing a box wrapped in brightly-colored cloth.

“What’s that?”

“This,” Hannibal says, putting down the bundle and beginning to unwrap it, “is a furoshiki.”

“The cloth, or--” Will taps the lid of the two-tiered bamboo box. “--or this?”

“The cloth. ‘Furoshiki’ means ‘bath spread’ but it has long since become used for wrapping gifts and carrying other delicate items.”

Will reaches out and rubs the blue and yellow cloth between his fingers. “You brought it, so I’m guessing there’s some kind of greater metaphor to the birds here.”

Hannibal’s lips twitch in amusement. “It’s a pattern known as chidori, the Japanese word for the plover, which would be the bird you are currently crushing between your thumb and forefinger.”

“I haven’t heard it take offense yet, but I haven’t heard the underlying analogy, either.”

“The chidori pattern symbolizes wealth. Longevity.” He removes the elastic band from around the box. “But as far as what it means to me, I simply find it lovely.”

“It is,” says Will. He folds it neatly, taking care to smooth each fold without creasing it. “So I’m guessing that’s a bento box.”

“You are correct.”

Will accepts one of the two tiers from Hannibal, as well as a matching set of chopsticks. “Should I be careful opening this?” Will asks. “Is this going to be like the proverbial clown car and just explode with deliciousness?”

“I’ve never had the pleasure of dining on clown,” replies Hannibal. He tries not to read anything into how the two of them turn their bodies to face each other at the same time,

absolutely in sync. Instead, he takes the carafe and fills two cups with water. “Shall I walk you through it?”

Will takes off the lid and says, “This is an elegant and well-organized clown car.”

Hannibal clears his throat and resolutely doesn’t take offense at Will’s comparison. “Where would you like to begin?”

“I know that these are rice balls.”

“Ah, thank you for reminding me to get out the nori.”

Will opens the small box containing his chopsticks. “I thought--I mean, I’ve seen--isn’t the seaweed usually on these already? Please be aware that my knowledge of Japanese food is limited to the anime and kung fu films I’ve watched.”

Hannibal’s shoulders shake as he quietly laughs. “You are correct, but I prefer crisp nori, and it softens if you leave it on the onigiri before packing.”

“Gotcha. Let’s see, what else...okay, these look like green beans.” Hannibal watches Will point to various items with his chopsticks; he’s pleased to see him holding them correctly. “That is definitely shrimp, and that looks like...egg?”

“Dashimaki tamago. It’s a rolled omelet made with a fish broth.”

Will’s chopsticks falter, but his voice does not. “Why don’t you give me the whole presentation? You know, like last time. I’m going to be honest; the only other thing I really recognize are the cooked carrots shaped like flowers.”

Hannibal is all too happy to do so, of course. It takes them a few minutes to go through the box, as Hannibal insists on giving both the name and a short explanation for each item.

“Each onigiri is made with uruchimai, Japanese-style rice. The first is unfilled, the rice instead mixed with furikake, which itself is made from radish leaves and katsuobushi, shavings of the bonito fish. I have garnished the second with a sprinkle of gomashio and it is filled with umeboshi, which is a pickled fruit similar to a salty plum. Third is another filled onigiri, this time with shiozake, a grilled and flaked salted salmon.”

Will accepts a proffered piece of nori. “Should I be worried about my sodium intake?”

“You could eat less processed food for the next few days to make up for it,” Hannibal suggests.

“Aren’t you just hilarious?”

“I like to think so.” Hannibal watches Will fiddle with the strip of nori as if he can’t decide what to do with it. “You pinch it around the onigiri,” he instructs, “so that your fingers do not touch the rice.”

“I know,” says Will. He flips the strip over and over in his fingers.

Hannibal's forehead wrinkles. "Then what--"

"I might've skipped breakfast." He reaches for Hannibal's hand, then abruptly draws back like the eye on the stove is too hot. "Don't...don't be mad. I just wanted to enjoy your food, and I was too anxious to eat, anyway."

Hannibal turns his palm up, an invitation to take it should Will want to, leaving it on his knee, casual, unthreatening. *Darling boy*, he wants to say, but he doesn't. "I must confess that I had difficulty eating this morning, as well," he says, instead.

"You were anxious, too?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

Will's hand creeps across the gap between them; the pads of his fingers venture no further than Hannibal's distal knuckles. He curls his and Hannibal's fingertips together, a crude, perhaps even cruel approximation of holding hands.

That same crawling anxiety finds its way back from the breakfast table to Hannibal's gut. "Is this too much?" he asks.

"I don't know," says Will, "but I'm not going to think about it right now."

"Shall I distract you by walking through the rest of our lunch?"

Will tightens his hold on Hannibal's fingertips. "Please."

"The green beans you pointed out are stir fried with aburaage, fried tofu skins, and seasoned with a pinch of ichimi togarashi. There are two gyoza dumplings--"

"They look a little like the potstickers Beverly brings over sometimes."

Hannibal nods. "They're very similar. Both are typically filled with pork and cabbage, as are these. The fried shrimp you pointed out earlier are shrimp tatsuaage, marinated in a mixture of soy sauce, mirin and ginger. As for the vegetable garnishes, there are the carrot flowers and pickled lotus root. We already covered the dashimaki tamago, but I recommend eating it together with the shredded daikon radish, which is..." Hannibal turns to look back in his bag, leaving his chopsticks lying over the bento tier, still pointing out the omelet slices. He returns with a series of small containers. "Which is in this pot here. The others contain a variety of sauces that you might enjoy."

"How much time did you spend cooking this morning?"

Hannibal licks his lips. "Not as long as you might think," he says. "I've practiced enough to become very adept at cooking several things at once."

"And where did you learn all of this?"

"It occurs to me that you are several questions ahead in our game of quid pro quo," Hannibal tells him. "Perhaps we should start our meal? I will be happy to tell you as we go along, after

I take a turn, of course.”

“Oh, of course.” Hannibal loves the sound of Will’s smile already. “I have no idea where I’m going to start, but digging in is a fantastic idea.”

Hannibal releases Will’s fingers regretfully, but not overly so; he wants to hear Will enjoy the meal he’s made. “Osaki ni dōzo.”

“And what does that mean?”

“Please, go ahead.”

Will doesn’t have to be told twice. Hannibal finds it interesting that Will goes for the green beans first, as well as the carrots and daikon. After listening to the grocery list Beverly rattled off, he had assumed Will disliked vegetables. Instead, Will openly enjoys them, and Hannibal makes a mental note to include more in future meals. Not too many, though, lest he stray too close to a vegetarian menu.

“I think I could live on just the veggies,” Will says.

Hannibal scoffs. “I certainly hope not.”

“Confirmed carnivore?”

“Absolutely.”

Will laughs, and takes a shrimp, waving it at Hannibal between his chopsticks. “So what do you want to know?” he asks before taking a bite. The subtle sounds of gustatory satisfaction are going to kill Hannibal.

“What are you knitting?” he asks in lieu of death.

“I have seven active projects,” says Will after swallowing. “You’re going to have to be more specific.”

“Seven?”

“Mmhmm.” Will returns to the green beans. “The county shelter’s having a fundraiser. They’re trying to go no kill.”

Hannibal nods. “And you donate goods for it?”

“I sell stuff online, too. Charlie set up an Etsy store for me.” He pauses, eating several pieces of the aburaage at once. Hannibal immediately rifles through the tofu recipes he has memorized.

“It is rude to ask, of course,” Hannibal starts, “but is your business a hobby like mine?”

Will snorts. “Yeah. I donate all the profits to various things. Mostly dog rescue organizations. Some local food pantries. Money’s not something I have to worry about.” He takes up a piece

of nori and says, “There is a certain benefit to the feds being terrified of a lawsuit, you know.”

“I suppose there is,” and Hannibal does the same as Will, choosing his favorite of the onigiri, the one with shiozake.

“The monthly stipend the government sends is too much, honestly. Ought to go to...gosh, I don’t know, disabled widows and orphans or some such. The free health care, though, that’s vital. Even have a doctor that makes house calls.”

“That is an excellent perk in this tumultuous political climate.”

“Could have done without the twenty years of hell, but...” Will finally reaches for the onigiri furikake. “Anyway, the store does well, and knit goods are a lot easier to sell than rebuilt boat motors.”

Hannibal blinks instead of taking another bite. “Boat motors?”

“Boat motors,” he confirms, but doesn’t explain. “Jesus, Hannibal, these are amazing. I get why they’re so popular now.”

“I was very averse to making onigiri at first,” says Hannibal. “The traditional method for forming the rice balls was extremely irritating.”

There’s a long pause before Will asks, “And how’s that? Also do you have a napkin? I’ve got a piece of rice stuck to my lips and I don’t want to be rude in front of you, even if you can’t see me.”

Hannibal would rather get the offending grain off of Will himself. He imagines that would cross the line into “too much touching” territory, however, so he passes Will a cloth napkin. “Onigiri is formed while the rice is still hot. You wet your palms and salt them, then mold the rice in your hands. The first time I made them, my hands were red and raw for several days after.”

“You must’ve made a bunch.”

“Yes,” he says, shaking his head fondly. “Chiyoh was quite adamant that we not stop until my onigiri met her exacting standards.”

“Chiyoh?” Will selects the umeboshi, carefully wrapping the nori around its cylindrical shape. “Who’s Chiyoh?”

“She was my aunt’s handmaiden,” Hannibal explains. “Chiyoh came with her from Hiroshima when my aunt and uncle married.”

“And you lived with them?”

“They adopted me when I was thirteen.” The aftertaste of the shiozake grows bitter in his mouth. “Chiyoh was a few years younger than I.”

“That seems to be a habit of yours,” says Will, “letting younger women boss you around.” He’s positively burning through the onigiri, already on his last. Hannibal will have to teach him to eat more slowly.

Still primarily distracted by thoughts of the past, Hannibal looks up.

Will’s eyes are so much bluer than he remembers.

“I eat anything and everything, at first,” Will begins, Hannibal’s tone sounding foreign even to his own ears. “After the soldiers and the forest and the orphanage, it doesn’t matter what it is or how it tastes. I simply eat. But the memories are stronger than my appetite, and I begin to waste away again. A few weeks pass, and Chiyoh wakes me up in the middle of the night, her hair braided in two pigtails, still in her long pink nightgown. She drags me out of bed and down, down, down into the kitchen, where I’ve never been before--’It’s improper for someone of your status.’”

Hannibal can’t even remember when he last heard Lady Murasaki’s voice. It doesn’t matter in comparison to Will’s silent siren call. He wonders, distantly, whether he reached out for Will or if Will reached for him. Regardless, they’ve grabbed each other’s wrists.

“She cooks the rice. She washes and salts my hands, and I let her, mutely. She loads my palms with uruchimai, and it burns, it *burns*, and it’s the first thing I’ve felt besides hunger in years. Over and over, again and again, until it’s perfect, until *I’m* perfect. We eat them in the dark, sitting on the cold stone floor, and Chiyoh tells me this is a comfort food in her homeland, and I believe her, for I am comforted.”

Will’s eyes close, and Hannibal is immediately bereft. He snatches back his hands, and Hannibal’s skin grows cold where Will has left the light impressions of his fingers. Before Will can apologize, though, Hannibal says, “Thank you.”

“Well, *that’s* a first.”

“It was my fault. Again.”

“I’ve been looking at you the whole time,” admits Will. “I forgot to take turns and share sight with you.”

“I believe you just did,” and that gets a smile out of Will. He looks healthier than the last time Hannibal saw him, if a bit paler than he was in his texted photo. His face is the slightest bit fuller; it wouldn’t be noticeable, at all, if Hannibal wasn’t specifically looking for it. “I do mean that, Will. I’m honored to share one of my favorite memories with you.”

“Ask me something,” Will tells him, words rushed together. “Anything you want to know. Don’t leave me feeling like a thief.”

Hannibal thinks for a moment before asking, “Would you care to go for a short walk after lunch?”

Will barks a laugh. “I think that can be arranged, though I have to tell you, I was kind of looking forward to that tummy rub.”

And that explains Will’s words earlier. Suddenly, Will’s strange relationship with physical affection makes even *more* sense. He anticipates Hannibal’s touch. Plans for it, even. Of course it would be difficult for Will to allow himself to be touched if not on his own terms; of course he would jerk his hand away from unscheduled contact.

“Don’t fret,” says Hannibal, the weight lifted from his heart. “There will still be plenty of dessert to enjoy after our stroll.”

Chapter End Notes

True fact: I plotted out the bento box to make sure everything mentioned would fit in it. I had to look for a ruler. My child tried to eat the sketch, and my mother was very confused by the whole affair.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

And we're back! Your patience is very much appreciated. <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Cleaning up lunch is a brief affair. Will insists on keeping the bento box and chopsticks to return clean later--"You cooked," he says, "only fair that I wash and wipe." Hannibal is, of course, perfectly fine with this, as it means that he won't have to foist the leftovers on Will later. Will takes lunch inside, then comes back with what looks to be a purse, which he deposits his knitting in. Hanging it on the doorknob, he waves Hannibal down the stairs.

"After you," Will insists, and Hannibal is hard-pressed to remember the last time someone was a gentleman to him and not the other way around. Hannibal has to take a series of deep breaths once he reaches the bottom of the stairs to keep himself from offering Will a hand to take; if Will wants his assistance, he will ask for it. He will not do Will the indignity of assuming he needs help because of his condition. Will is a person first; God knows he hasn't been treated as such for the majority of his life.

The *thump* of the walker boots on the steps seems to echo in his ears. Time slows down as Hannibal waits for Will to make it down each one, six separate sounds for a set of three stairs.

"There we go," says Will, settling at the bottom. He clears his throat, and offers Hannibal his arm. "Because I know it's killing you not to."

Hannibal smiles softly and links arms with him. "I am, first and foremost, a gentleman."

"You are." Will puts his other hand on Hannibal's upper arm. "This feels positively Victorian."

"We should both be grateful that my ankles remain covered."

Will's arm shakes with quiet laughter. "I don't know about that."

"Careful, Will," says Hannibal. "You would steer us into impropriety."

"I've never been proper a day in my life." Will pats his arm. "C'mon. You asked me for a walk. Allow me to show you around the vast fields of nothing that comprise my stately manor."

Will's land is, in all seriousness, extensive. At first, Hannibal had only seen the forest on the side of the road coming in; now, as they walk along that same road, he can see that it borders at least two more edges.

“Is all of this yours?” Hannibal asks, breaking the silence as they pass the mailbox.
“Everything between the woods?”

“Yeah,” Will says. “Yeah, I’ve got my own private little world out here. Plenty of room to spread out, or at least for my pack to spread out.”

“How did you come by it?”

“Inherited it. Sort of. It’s--it’s complicated.” Will laces his fingers together in front of him without dropping Hannibal’s arm. “Maybe another time?”

“Of course,” though Hannibal’s curiosity is piqued. “What would you like to talk about?”

“Can I call one of my dogs?” asks Will in a rush. He’s steadier on his feet than with his words. “I think...I’d like to talk about my dogs.” Hannibal nods, and is surprised when Will follows up with, “Close your eyes, please.”

Hannibal does, and what happens next is, as he expected, unexpected. Will turns them--rather, Will moves to face another direction, and neither he nor Hannibal are inclined to unlink arms, so Hannibal winds up shuffling along. There’s a series of zippers unzipping, and then various rustlings noises, and then Will suddenly sounds like a duck.

A duck.

“Will--”

“*Shhhhh*. Just wait.” So Hannibal does that, too, while trying to figure out why on earth Will has trained his dogs to respond to a duck call.

A slight breeze picks up, though Hannibal doesn’t feel it on his skin. It moves his coat tails and disturbs his perfectly styled hair. His sense of smell is impeccable, acute, but he doesn’t scent anything on the wind. At the very least, he should smell the trees or the dirt or the verdant green of infant grass, pushing through the ground in the wrong season.

“Okay,” Will says. “You can look now.”

Hannibal opens his eyes. At his feet sits a very muddy dog.

“Sorry about the dramatic entrance.” Will sighs, and Hannibal hears him putting the duck call back into his jacket, then zipping up all the pockets he searched through. “Winston’s big on those.”

“Winston.” The dog blinks at him. “Hello, Winston.” Hannibal isn’t sure why he holds out his hand; it just seems like the proper thing to do. Winston immediately lifts a paw and places it on Hannibal’s palm, then barks twice.

“Oh good. He likes you!”

“Yes,” says Hannibal. “Yes, that’s...good.”

Will laughs, Hannibal imagines at the very ginger way he holds Winston's paw; were he not so worried about staining his suit, Hannibal's certain he would give a more sure, substantial handshake. "You haven't spent a lot of time around dogs, have you?"

"I have never had occasion to do so, no."

A short whistle, and Winston drops his paw; a longer, lower one, and he turns to trot off in front of them. Hannibal looks down at his hand, now horribly muddy. He reaches to try and sneak it under his coat to retrieve his handkerchief, but Will grabs it.

This is, by far, the worst hand-holding Hannibal has ever experienced in his life, and he just held hands with a dog. He's not sure what to make of that.

"Well...shit," says Will. "I was going to be all suave and fetch your handkerchief for you, but I seem to have mucked that right up." He pauses before adding, "This is nice, though. The--the hand-holding bit. Not planned, but. Nice."

Hannibal drops Will's hand before slipping his arm free from the crook of Will's. He steps around to Will's other side, then grabs his hand again. "I think this is nicer," he says, "as long as I am not being too forward."

He's quickly becoming accustomed to the way Will's chest swells when he smiles. "I sent you a shirtless photo from my bed. The only one being forward here is me."

"And Bedelia."

"And Bedelia," agrees Will. "Although I have yet to see proof of that."

Hannibal squeezes Will's hand, quite gratified by the tiny gasp he makes. "I left my phone in my bag," he tells Will. "I will be happy to show you the photo she insisted on taking for you after our walk."

"Fair enough." Will sounds shaky, though his grip is sure. "Let's get going, then. Winston's getting impatient."

They walk along silently again, and he was wrong in his initial assessment--this is *excellent* hand-holding. Hannibal resists the urge to run his thumb along Will's; he's honestly shocked that Will has maintained the unplanned touch. "I don't want to misstep, but I have noticed that sometimes you are averse to being touched."

"Is that a question?" His tone isn't clipped, still warm and amiable.

"I only want you to feel comfortable around me. That's all."

Will sniffs and rubs his nose with the back of his sleeve. "It's not so much that I dislike touch. It just...it's very intense. I don't like being surprised with it, because I find it hard to process when--"

Ahead of them, Winston stops, then turns around and looks back at Will. His head is cocked to one side, questioning.

"It's okay," Will calls out. "I'm fine." Winston barks once, then sits down, ostensibly to wait for them to catch up to him. Will wiggles his fingers in Hannibal's grasp, but doesn't make to remove his hand. "I find friendly, loving touch extremely overwhelming. Pain is much easier to manage, although my body does like proving me wrong on occasion, so it might be more accurate to say that pain is easier to manage *emotionally*."

"You were hurt very badly." Hannibal does his best to maintain an air of honesty, keeping to statements instead of lying by pretending he needs to ask.

"I was," he says very quietly. "For a very long time."

"Let me know if this--" Hannibal raises their hands up, bending at the elbows, shakes them from side to side gently but emphatically. "--become too much."

And then Will does the unthinkable; he pulls Hannibal's hand over, and kisses his knuckles. He huffs a laugh against them when Hannibal's hand shakes in his. "I *crave* touch, Hannibal. On my most difficult days, when I can't escape my house, I feel like I'm starving for it. It's--how do I explain this?" Now that they've caught up, Winston rubs himself up against Will's leg like a cat, marking him. "Sometimes I have to distract myself into being able to accept it without initiating. Like I'll sit in my floor to work on things or read because I know that, eventually, I'll have at least one dog come lay beside me, touching me. And it will be okay, because it's idle touch, and I'm doing something else."

"That makes sense," says Hannibal. "Distraction therapy has been shown to be very effective in dealing with traumatic injuries and procedures."

"There's also...consent is very important to me, Hannibal. Going out into the world, being around others--it's not only dangerous because of my visions, but because most people don't think twice about personal space. Sure, we keep bubbles around ourselves, space cushions. It's another artifact of old English Imperialism, all these confusing and conflicting social constructs and concepts. At the same time, people feel entitled to invading the personal space of others without asking, which is really just a product of plain old human banality. Our refined emotions battle with our basest natures, and usually wind up meeting somewhere near the middle."

Will whistles at Winston to go on ahead, then kisses Hannibal's knuckles again before dropping their hands between them once more. "Anyway," continues Will, "what I'm saying is I don't like the risk of being jostled. Probably could have said that without all the pretension."

"I hardly find you pretentious," Hannibal assures him. They turn before reaching the wall of dark trees, following Winston through the tall brown grass that grows at the far end of Will's property. Hannibal could have sworn the lot was much larger when they started out, and he briefly wonders why the tiny green shoots no longer poke their heads up from the ground. "You're intelligent and well-read. I choose to believe there's a difference."

"You would."

"Are you self-taught?"

Will bumps their shoulders together playfully. "Did you really need to ask that?"

"You did owe me quite a few questions."

More sniffing and snorting. "I taught myself to read. Taught myself basically everything else after that. I love books. Fiction, history, biographies, classics, kids books--it's nice, getting stories the way everyone else does." Will's step falters slightly, and he leans away from Hannibal for a moment. "I've always felt daunted by the--the more religious texts."

"Why?"

He shrugs. "Not real big on faith, that's all."

Hannibal nods; ahead of them, Winston looks back and catches Hannibal's eye. He doesn't know how to read dogs, has never had an interest in learning until now. "I share your feelings on the matter," Hannibal says. "Belief, but no trust in the Almighty."

Will trips up again, curses, and Winston runs back. He whines at Hannibal, but thankfully doesn't approach his pants leg. "Are you alright?" Hannibal asks.

"Just...just kind of tired."

"Are you in pain?"

"A little," admits Will. "Nothing I can't handle."

And Hannibal isn't sure what to do. He's torn between wanting to offer help and knowing better than to do so. Winston won't stop staring at him, though, as if he's silently judging him for his lack of action. It leaves Hannibal feeling distinctly uncomfortable. "I would not presume to ask if you need assistance," Hannibal begins, "but I believe good Winston will hold it against me if I don't."

Will exhales heavily. He sounds tired, defeated. "I could use a hand, yeah."

There's no hesitation, no consideration for his expensive wool overcoat. Hannibal lifts Will's arm and puts his muddy hand over his shoulder, directly on the lapel. He scarcely believes his own disregard for his clothes. Bedelia certainly won't.

"Thank you," says Will as Hannibal winds an arm around his waist. "I haven't worn these damn boots in a while. And I'm tired, anyway."

"You have a cold?" Winston sets off again, so Hannibal says, "Put your weight on me." Will does, letting his head slump with the rest of him. Hannibal can smell his shampoo; it has a heavily chemical odor, overlaid by the scent of overcompensatory youthful intention. He tries to focus, instead, on the welcome feeling of Will huddled up against him, tucked into his side.

"I'm allergic to damn near everything," says Will as they begin the trek toward the house.

"Even dogs?"

Will tips his head slightly into himself as he grins, yet another tell Hannibal is quickly becoming used to interpreting. He had known how important body language and facial gestures were before, but conversations with Will have brought Hannibal an entirely new perspective. “Not dogs, thankfully enough. Mold, pollen, dust, grass. I’m an allergist’s wet dream.” Will takes a sudden, quick breath. “That was probably inappropriate.”

“I won’t tell if you won’t,” Hannibal says, “though I cannot speak for Winston.”

“That’s true,” Will replies. “He’s very adamant about sharing his own opinions. Anyway, all the allergies and susceptibility comes from having a piss-poor immune system due to never being exposed to...anything, really. My life before my release was relatively antibacterial and bleach-treated.”

“Are you sick very often?” Hannibal has an unexpected, intense daydream of tucking Will into bed and feeding him soup while they watch *Masterpiece Theatre* in matching plaid pajamas.

“Nothing awful, usually. Sinuses kept me up last night, so I probably should’ve canceled with you on the off-chance it’s something contagious. But I--” Will chuckles. “--I really wanted to see you.”

Hannibal nearly tips his head over to rest atop Will’s before realizing that it might startle him. “As I did you.” He prevents himself from nestling his face into Will’s hair, terrible shampoo be damned. “Tell me about Winston. I believe you wanted to talk about him at the beginning of our walk.”

“Oh! Yeah, sure, of course. What do you want to know? Although,” he says cheekily, poking Hannibal’s neck, “I think we’re well past the end of your turn.”

“Apologies.”

“It’s fine. Besides, I like talking about my dogs.” As if to confirm, Winston barks. “I saw him walking along the side of the road a few months ago, so he’s the newest member of the family. Part golden retriever, part mud magnet. Never comes home clean; likes baths too much.”

“Why the duck call?”

Will hisses, and Hannibal adjusts to keep them from side-stepping. “Streamlining. It’s easier to have whistle commands, but there’s only so many different kinds of whistles you can make before it starts to get out of hand. I have them all trained to a bird call. Winston’s is a mallard.”

Hannibal shakes his head. “So you carry seven bird calls on your person at all times?”

“Usually only one at a time, though I always manage to put it in a different pocket. It’s like how most people lose their keys, I guess; whatever tool you use most frequently is the one that’s always hardest to find.”

“A sort of Murphy’s Law.”

“More of a Stapp’s Ironical Paradox,” Will says, “but basically. But I figured you and Winston might get along best, both being the dramatic beasts that you are, so I took the duck call in case I needed moral support. No offense.”

“None taken,” Hannibal assures him. “I cannot deny my personal flair, and it can be intimidating, establishing a rapport.”

Will brings his hand up to rest on top of Hannibal’s, still wrapped snugly around Will’s waist. “Don’t want to say something off-putting. Though I’m starting to get the impression that I couldn’t scare you off even if I wanted to.”

“That makes me sound vaguely predatory,” says Hannibal.

“If you were out to get me,” Will replies, “then Winston would’ve taken your hand clean off instead of shaking it.”

For once, Winston has nothing to add.

Chapter End Notes

Stapp's Ironical Paradox is one of those adages that you don't hear much outside of its jargon of origin. My dad, being a technical engineer with the Air Force, passed the knowledge of it on to me. Stapp's Ironical Paradox (*The universal aptitude for ineptitude makes any human accomplishment an incredible miracle.*) is much like Murphy's Law (*Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.*) in that both adages espouse that humans are prone to constantly fucking things up.

And now you know!

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Wow. Apologies for the unintended delay. I've been working on finishing up [Tèvelis](#) for [#NovemberAmnesty](#), and then the election happened, and I've kind of been sitting on the couch rocking back and forth in horror ever since.

Now that I'm a bit less numb--still panicked beyond measure, mind you, but calmer--I've found that writing is extremely cathartic in the face of the Trumpocalypse. Hopefully, that catharsis yields more frequent updates to this fic. After all, fluff is good for everybeeble.

Speaking of fluff, part three of The Date That Never Ends awaits you! <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hannibal finds Will's living area cluttered, but strangely charming. "Make yourself at home," Will says, limping his way toward the kitchen, and the house does feel extremely homey, so Hannibal anticipates no difficulty in doing just that. "I think I managed to lint roll all the dog hair off of the furniture," adds Will, his voice echoing from the other room, "but I've got a clean sheet folded up on the end of the bed if you want to drape it over a chair. Just in case."

"Very thoughtful of you."

"Do you want coffee?" Hannibal hears Will rustling through a cabinet. "It won't be nearly as good as yours, I guarantee, but I do use a pour-over, so it won't be terrible."

"I'm sure it will be fine." He sets his bag on the squat brown armchair next to the door and begins looking for somewhere to put his coat before deciding there are no visible options. "Where might I put my coat?" Hannibal asks hopefully. Maybe there's a furless pocket dimension somewhere in the room. Preferably one that smells less of dog.

"Oh, right." Will's walker boots *thunk* against the linoleum floor as he walks out of the kitchen. "I've got some hooks in here next to the back door. Sorry, I'm..." He chuckles ruefully. "I'm afraid I'm not a very good host."

"Nonsense. There are bad hosts, and there are inexperienced and unpracticed ones. You've already offered me somewhere to sit and a hot drink." Hannibal reaches for Will's arm to offer physical reassurance, then remembers he shouldn't and curls his fingers into his hand, dropping it back by his side.

But Will holds out his hand. "This is hard for me, too," he admits. "I'm not usually this driven to touch someone."

Hannibal slowly, carefully puts his hand in Will's. It's less a handshake and more like the way he's seen young children hold hands in the park before swinging their arms between them like a half-arc'd jump rope. Friendship, though the grip on Hannibal's fingers speaks to something much deeper. Hannibal wishes he could look up and see if Will is smiling.

Will beats him to asking. "I swear I can *hear* you smile at this point."

"Likewise."

A final squeeze of his hand. "I'm gonna go finish the coffee. Well. Start the coffee, actually."

Hannibal hands off his coat, then turns to investigate the room as unobtrusively as possible, lest his curiosity be deemed inappropriate. Will's living area is painted a soothing blue green, like a lake teeming with algae and life. The paint is only a few shades darker than his suit; even the taupe and pink windowpane check manages to coordinate, the former with a chair, the latter with a knitted throw blanket on another.

The furniture, however, doesn't match each other in the slightest. It looks as though a delivery truck on its way to a thrift store crashed and had a house built around it. All three chairs are different styles and colors. The rug is extremely well-worn, though it doesn't particularly matter what it looks like, seeing as it's covered in throw pillows and dog toys. There's a table with fly-tying equipment, and another with skeins of rolled yarn on dowels and what looks like a large spindle or winder clamped to it.

Across the room, directly facing the lovely stonework fireplace, is the bed. Sure enough, a threadbare sheet lies folded neatly on the end of it; the bed, itself, seems to have been an afterthought when it came to decorating. It's been freshly-made--Hannibal can still smell the lingering scent of off-brand dryer sheets--with crisp cream linens and the kind of soft blue blanket that reminds Hannibal of his days working in the hospital. The same single pillow from the picture Will texted him, and Hannibal immediately wants to bring him at least five more, and a better blanket, and a less ugly lamp for his bedside table.

What intrigues Hannibal the most, however, are the bookshelves which line literally every wall. Rows upon rows of books, both old and new, well-cared for and falling apart, organized by color, of all things. Classics, volumes of poetry, Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys and vintage issues of *True Crime* magazine.

Strangest of all, on the bookshelf nearest the bed, an entire shelf of copies of *The Little Prince*. Hannibal looks across to the art over the mantle; it's an illustration of a boy and a fox, sitting next to each other, looking at the sky. "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly," it says. "What is essential is invisible to the eye."

"From *The Little Prince*," Will says, having crept up beside him.

"I thought as much." Hannibal pivots, keeping his eyes firmly on the neck of Will's gray t-shirt. He's finally taken his coat off, and now Hannibal can see the forest green and navy blue flannel he's wearing. It's mostly buttoned, all except the top two, but untucked. Hannibal usually finds overly casual dress unappealing on adults or non-collegiates; this suits Will. He looks comfortable, which is all Hannibal wants for him.

Will jams his hands into the pockets of his jeans. “Coffee’s ready, if you want to come in here.”

Hannibal grabs his bag, and follows Will into the kitchen. It’s narrow, but immaculate, far less cluttered than the front room. The appliances are old, as are the counters and cabinets, clean though worse for wear. Will pulls out a mismatched chair for him from the white wooden table.

“I know,” he says, “my decorating is kind of...eclectic.” Will eases himself into a chair, stretching out his legs with a sigh of relief. “Some of it came with the house, like this table, and most of the bookshelves. Others, I picked up secondhand.” Hannibal watches his upper arms shift as Will shrugs. “I just buy what makes me happy.”

Hannibal takes his own seat, unbuttoning his suit jacket--it’s tighter than he remembers, likely from all the test baking he’s been doing as of late. He pulls the second bento box from the bag, one made of plastic, whimsical where the first was refined. “We should be surrounded by what brings us joy, no matter the arrangement,” Hannibal tells Will, slipping the elastic band from around the container.

Next to him, Will leans down to begin unstrapping one of his walker boots; the telltale crunch of ripping Velcro grates against his ears. Hannibal has never cared for hook-and-loop fasteners. Humanity managed perfectly well without it before the 1950s.

“And what brings you joy?” Will asks, blissfully unaware of Hannibal’s internal wincing. “I mean materially, not hobby-wise.”

“Books,” he answers, now separating the utensil compartment from the top tier. “I have amassed quite the collection over the years, primarily nonfiction.”

“Hand-picked? Inherited? First editions?”

Hannibal sits back in his chair, crossing his legs, clasping his hands over his knee. “I do collect first editions, though I don’t seek them out. It is far more satisfying, relying on serendipity. Many of them were selected for pleasure, but far more out of necessity. I kept all of my textbooks from university and medical school, for instance. Others were purchased to assist me in diagnosing and treating my psychiatry patients. As for the matter of inheritance, any physical assets were liquidated and invested long ago.”

Will huffs a laugh. “You make it sound like you’re some kind of...I don’t know, aristocrat.”

Saying nothing, Hannibal continues to set up dessert, pulling a package of animal-shaped food picks from his tote bag.

“You’re shitting me.”

“As I said,” says Hannibal, “the physical estate is gone. I refused to visit our lands and castle-
_”

“Your--” Will splutters; the front legs of his chair tap against the floor as he leans forward, elbows and forearms on the table. “Your *castle*?”

“I am the eighth Count Hannibal Lecter.”

“Jesus Christ,” says Will, “as if I didn’t already feel completely inadequate.” He drums the fingers of one hand lightly, nails tapping against the wood. “A doctor, a musician, a chef, an entrepreneur, a damn aristocrat. I’m on a date with a human conglomerate.”

Hannibal feels his neck warm, though it doesn’t reach his face. “Is that what this is?”

“What?”

“A date.”

There’s an awkward silence. Hannibal can almost hear the gears turning in Will’s head as he rewinds their conversation. “Oh,” he quietly remarks. “I mean, it doesn’t have to be. It’s--it’s not as if we went out somewhere, like--” Will sighs. “Like with a less weird person.”

Hannibal lays his hand on the table next to Will’s, palm up. “It’s fine to be weird,” he assures him. “I’m having a wonderful time on our perhaps-a-date.”

And Will laughs fully now, tentatively stilling his fingers and putting his hand in Hannibal’s. “So what’s for dessert?”

“I have prepared--”

Will picks up the lid to the bento box with his free hand. “Is this a cartoon dachshund? And--” He pokes the package of picks with the lid. “Little plastic dog skewers?”

“They do appear to be,” says Hannibal, “yes.”

“It seems a little too...quaint for your tastes.”

Hannibal chuckles. “Chiyoh finds it humorous to send me various amusing food accoutrements that she finds on her travels.”

“She vacations?” Will asks. He takes his hand back from Hannibal in order to grab the picks and examine them more closely.

“Backpacks. Chiyoh is something of a vagabond. I never quite know where she is until she pops up on my doorstep for a visit.” Hannibal pushes the bento over toward Will and adds, “I actually brought this one to leave here with you. This one seemed most appropriate from my collection, given the dog.” He wants to go on, explain why he’s giving this particular gift, but hesitates--everything feels so personal, like Hannibal’s cracked himself open. The game of quid pro quo has spun away from him; they’re stopped taking turns and resorted to monologues.

Hannibal sighs, and gives into his elaborative instinct. “Presentation is an important part of the meal. When we take care in how food looks, we intrinsically care about the food itself.

Well-presented food, therefore, is more palatable. We desire it more.”

Will sets down the lid and takes Hannibal’s hand, still lying desolate on the tabletop, in both of his. “It’s like the rice balls, isn’t it? A way to encourage you to eat when you don’t want to.”

“That’s what it was at first, yes, before I took up the culinary arts. Now, her gifts are another collection that brings me joy.”

His hand is squeezed; Will rubs an errant thumb across Hannibal’s palm, seemingly absentminded. “Thank you,” he says gently. “I’ll try and put it to good use. Or them, rather. I’m assuming the picks come alongside.”

Hannibal closes his eyes, savoring Will’s touch, wondering if Will might take the opportunity to look at his face, should he notice that Hannibal can’t see him. “They do.”

“Then thank you for those, too. And, not to sound too eager, but...dessert?”

“Of course,” says Hannibal. “Far be it from me to deny you sweets.” *I couldn’t deny you anything*, he adds to himself as he removes the lid from the bottom tier. “I have prepared for us today--”

“Are these...” Will helps himself to a piece of fruit. “Are these strawberry roses?”

It isn’t often that Hannibal feels flushed, like he’s overdone a presentation. In fact, it’s never. Still, now that he can’t look to see how his art has been received, Hannibal finds himself nervous. “They are simple to make,” he says, as though admitting it will make the whole arrangement more palatable. In case it isn’t. Which he doesn’t know.

But then Will’s leaning in, holding it in front of him, the very tip of the bloom touching his bottom lip. “You first,” says Will, and there’s nothing but sin in his voice, and Hannibal is going to be undone by a strawberry. “I insist.” So Hannibal opens his mouth obediently, lets Will push the whole strawberry inside, cut petals tickling his tongue. It’s so remarkably erotic he could cry.

Hannibal longs to close his mouth around Will’s thumb and finger, lick the strawberry juice and sanding sugar from his skin. But he doesn’t, not only because he doesn’t want to spook Will and ruin this intimacy, but because Hannibal spent enough time under Bedelia’s thumb to know better than to act unrequested. Old habits do, in fact, die hard, it would seem.

What he does do is wait for Will to withdraw, and then takes the initiative to chew. Hannibal finds he can barely taste the strawberry, tastes instead the lingering flavor of coffee that has been transferred from Will’s skin, and Will’s skin itself, earthy and warm. Will doesn’t move his hand away; Hannibal looks down his nose at Will’s fingertips, poised as though he still wants to touch Hannibal, but isn’t sure where to start.

“Was that too forward?” The note of anxiety that Will is trying to hide is intoxicating. *Dominant, but simultaneously shy*, Hannibal notes. *How very curious.*

“On the contrary,” says Hannibal. “I believe that was just forward enough.”

“Can I--” Will takes a deep breath. “I’m going to put my hand on your face,” and he does. The weight of his palm is inviting; Hannibal thinks of turning his face into it, but remains still. “You’re awfully good at this.”

Hannibal’s chest is warm with the praise. “At what?”

“Making this easy,” he says. “I thought it would be more of a challenge for me, more difficult, and--what’s so funny?”

“Most people would not react well to being deemed ‘easy’.”

“Oh,” Will murmurs. His fingers absentmindedly stroke Hannibal’s sideburns. “I don’t...oh. *Oh!*” Will’s hand jerks away. “That’s not at all how I meant--”

“Dessert?” asks Hannibal, hoping that this redirect is successful. Will’s hands fidget on the table, thumbs rubbing along forefingers, and Hannibal supposes that Will is nodding, since nothing’s been said. “I have prepared for us,” Hannibal begins, “two types of macarons. The first here is a complement to our meal, a matcha green tea shell with an adzuki bean and cream cheese filling. As for the second, a simple lemon shell with a filling of lemon and buttercream.”

Hannibal is pleased to see that Will doesn’t hesitate, simply plucks one of the lemon macarons from the box. “How’d you know about the lemon cookies?” he asks, holding the cookie between his hands, pinched between thumbs and fingers as if it were a sandwich.

“Beverly said she picked up lemon creme cookies for you at the store, on occasion.” Hannibal takes a green tea macaron for himself. He doesn’t intend to eat very many of them, however; these are Will’s.

“There’s...a story to that.”

“I find there are for most things.”

Will turns the macaron in his fingers, twisting from side to side like a steering wheel. “There was this--this orderly,” starts Will, “in the hospital. Her name was Denise. She was always real sweet to me. I mean, hell, all she’d’ve really had to do to stand out as a saint would be to treat me like a human being, but Denise...she was good people. I--there--there was this little room that I hated, you know, even more than the op--the others.” Each consecutive breath Will takes is that much more strained. He pulls one of his hands away from the macaron, and Hannibal hears Will sniff once, loudly, into the sleeve of his shirt. “Anyway, she’d sneak in lemon creme sandwich cookies, and just poke them through the window to me when it was her guard shift.”

Hannibal isn’t sure what to do with his hands--he’s always been good at perfunctory comfort, handing a tissue, an unnecessary “And how did that make you feel?”--so he reaches for his coffee, leaving the macaron on the saucer in the cup’s stead. He takes a sip, half-expecting to need to make a show of enjoying it; to his delight, it’s more than palatable. “This is very

good, Will.” Hannibal flicks his eyes up as high as he dares, to Will’s lips, currently pulled into a grimace.

“You don’t have to say nice things because I brought up something awful.”

“I have never made a habit of placating others unless I deem it entirely necessary,” says Hannibal, cup warm in his fingers. “Had I disliked it, then I would have made a pleased noise, as it was kind of you to make it. Then, I would have sat it down in the saucer and forgotten all about it.”

Will’s laugh is ungainful, sputtery, and raucous. “I can’t decide if you’re funny on purpose, or just naturally that candid,” he says.

“A bit of both, I’m afraid. Then again, there is always an element of comedy within every truth, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not.”

“I’ll have to try to look at it from your perspective,” says Will. He’s returned to holding the lemon macaron with both hands; it doesn’t take much for Hannibal to picture those same hands smaller, skinnier, paler. Will takes a deep breath, Hannibal assumes to continue, but Will says nothing more.

“It is a difficult task, to weave gaiety from grief.” Hannibal takes another sip of his coffee. Not an ideal palate cleanser to say the least, but it will have to suffice. “Having small moments to build from helps,” he continues, “as does good company to share with.”

“Like you?” Will’s hands move up and out of Hannibal’s line of sight.

“I certainly hope so,” Hannibal murmurs, words absolutely lost to the ungodly groan Will makes during his first bite. As the almost-certainly-a-date progresses, Hannibal has become more and more grateful for the excellent control he has over his own body. At the moment, however, he’s mostly grateful for the table. “I do hope that’s edible,” he deadpans.

One of Will’s hands comes back to rest on the table, holding the cookie, a dainty bite taken out of it. The other Hannibal imagines is shielding Will’s mouth as he speaks. “I guess it’s okay,” says Will. “Just going to eat it to get rid of it.”

“I don’t suppose it would trouble you too much to help me get rid of the others?” Hannibal picks his green tea macaron back up. “I imagine it should be a great undertaking.”

“Always happy to help out a friend,” Will says quickly, hand and cookie disappearing once more.

“I would be very much obliged.” He nibbles at his own cookie. As he’d hoped, the bitterness of the matcha both offsets and complements the sweetness of the adzuki bean. “I do hate to bother you,” Hannibal continues after swallowing his bite and taking another drink.

“Nons--” Will coughs a little; the macaron is nearly gone now. “Nonsense,” he says. “No bother, at all.”

They work their way through the macarons slowly, continuing to politely quip back and forth. Hannibal does most of the talking, which he is happy to do; it means Will is eating more of the cookies, for one. And Will has the most infectious *giggle*, Hannibal has learned, little bells of exhalation suspended mid-ring. He tries--and completely fails--not to think about whether or not Will is ticklish, whether Will even *knows* if he is ticklish.

There are only two lemon macarons left when Will says, "Hang on a minute, I've got to--" His chair creaks as he twists and looks around. "I have a footstool here somewhere. Unless I moved it when I was Swiffering."

"You needn't have cleaned on my account," Hannibal tells him. "I know your legs have been bothering you."

"Which is why I, like every good octogenarian, have a Swiffer," explains Will. "I can clean sitting down if I have to. Which is more often than I care to admit. Anyway, speaking of being old, I have this little camping footrest that I use in here, but I'm not seeing--Hannibal, would you be a dear and lug in one from the living room?"

Hannibal knows that the back of his neck is red now. The casual manner in which Will asks, like they've known each other for ages, is shocking in the best possible way. His urge to call Will "darling" seems much less farfetched, unless Will is completely unaware of what he's just said.

But there's no way Hannibal is going to get a footstool when he has a perfectly good lap.

Foot fetish much?

Be quiet, Bedelia.

He pulls away from the table, settling himself closer to and in front of Will. "I propose an alternative option," Hannibal says.

Will sits back in his chair. "Really?"

"Unless that's too forward."

"You're such a troll," and Will must be looking at Hannibal's face, seeing his confusion. "You're baiting me. Like trolling for fish. You put your lure--the troll--on the line and draw it through the water. Here, you're baiting me with your words, hoping for a desirable response."

"And has it worked?" asks Hannibal hopefully.

Will sighs; Hannibal thinks he hears a playful eye roll, as well. It's likely a figment of his imagination, but given Will's sass, Hannibal doubts it. "The walker boots don't lend themselves to pleasantly-scented feet. Although," he continues, "if you aren't opposed to moving the rest of dessert to the other room, we could stretch out in there without me worrying about killing you with foot odor."

Hannibal sweeps his hand rather dramatically toward the living area and is rewarded immediately with the sweetest of scoffs. "After you."

“What? Not going to offer me your arm? I’m almost insulted.”

“My arm is yours,” Hannibal says as he stands. “All you must ever do is ask.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm already about 900 words into chapter fifteen, so hopefully we'll all meet again soon.
:)

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Holy shit, guise. I swear I never intended to wait this long between chapters. Life and other fic challenges kind of ate me there for a bit. But we're back!

I hope this long chapter makes up for your wait. <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will doesn't take up Hannibal's offer, though he looks like he might ask for his arm for a moment. Ultimately, he leaves Hannibal to bring the dessert and join him in the living room. It's no small task to balance two saucers with partially-filled coffee cups on his arm, but Hannibal manages. He isn't sure where he'll put them; then again, Will doesn't seem to be sure where they'll be sitting.

"I don't have a couch," says Will, immediately following up with, "Not that I would presume for us to sit next to each other closely. I mean, I'd like for us to, but--"

"Will." Hannibal watches him rub his thumbs across his fingers, hands down by his side, gingerly shifting weight from one foot to the other. "I offered to hold your feet. I think it is entirely fair for you to presume a mutual desire for closeness."

"I guess you're right. It's...our only option is the bed, is all."

Hannibal takes a deep breath. He is the master of his emotions, Hannibal reminds himself; he will not lose control; he will not tip his hand.

But *oh*, how he wants to.

"The bed is fine," Hannibal says, walking over to it. "I promise to exercise proper self-restraint." He bends his knees to set the bento box on the bed, leaving his hand free to put the saucers on the bedside table.

"Maybe I don't want you to," Will replies. Hannibal wonders if his expression matches the coyness of his voice, if his eyelashes flutter provocatively. But Will remains standing in the middle of the room, nervous, waiting. "There's only the one pillow," he says, gesturing toward it. "We'll have to lean up against the wall."

"A suggestion, if I may."

Will shrugs, and Hannibal's eyes are drawn to the hem of his t-shirt raising just enough to show a sliver of his stomach. "Sure."

“What if I were to take the pillow and sit against the wall, and you were to sit against me?” One of Will’s hands moves to scratch his opposite elbow as he considers. Hannibal decides to take initiative while Will mulls it over and begins to unbutton his waistcoat. He slips it off, glad for the extra breathing room.

“You’re getting undressed,” Will quietly notes.

Hannibal looks for somewhere to lay his waistcoat, but ultimately gives up and simply drapes it on the back of an armchair. “If we are to sit on your bed,” he begins, undoing his tie, “then it follows that we should be comfortable.”

“And how comfortable are you intending to get?”

“Only my tie and shoes to go,” says Hannibal, and his tie joins the waistcoat. He begins to roll up his sleeves. “There. Much better.” It’s rude, but Will apparently needs permission to sit on his own bed, so Hannibal sits down once he’s done, on the edge, and removes his shoes. “I can move, if you like,” he remarks offhand. “Your legs must be aching, and I seem to recall you mentioning propping up your feet.”

“You can be a real manipulative asshole, can’t you?” and Hannibal has nothing to say to that beyond shrugging himself. “It’s a good thing I like you, anyway.”

“I count myself very lucky.” Hannibal swings his legs onto the bed, scoots back toward the wall, and props the pillow up behind him. Then he closes his eyes, raises his head, and waits.

A few long minutes later, Hannibal hears the soft *swish* of Will’s flannel shirt dropping to the floor. “Ground rules for dessert cuddling.”

Hannibal chuckles silently; Will’s hand-knit socks are, themselves, inaudible on the hardwood, but the floor creaks slightly back and forth with his two-legged limping. “Is that what you intend to do?”

“Hush,” says Will, and he’s playful now, more confident. Hannibal briefly wonders just how long he can keep his eyes closed. “Okay. I--you--look, there’s not a nice way to ask you to spread your legs so I can sit between them, so if that’s amenable to you...” He trails off as the bed dips down.

Hannibal says nothing, only smirks and does as Will wants.

“I could get used to that.”

“What?” Will’s left calf brushes against the inside of Hannibal’s right; his leg tingles.

“You listening to me. Doing what I tell you to.”

“Does it make you feel powerful, Will?”

But Will doesn’t answer his question. “I’m going to sit here, between your legs. If I want further contact, if I feel like I can manage it, then I’ll ask. It’s occurred to me very quickly

that I could absolutely glut myself on your touch, but then I'd probably be stuck inside for a week, so...yeah. Not ideal."

"I should say not." Hannibal tries not to clutch at the blanket to keep himself from touching Will. "For the record, however."

"Yes?" Will still hasn't turned to sit. Hannibal feels dizzy with the need to have Will lying against him.

"I enjoy you in all your ways," says Hannibal. "As you are now, assertive, demanding. When we do nothing more than talk on the phone and you are cautious and stumbling. Hidden behind your door, barely a breath apart."

Will is quiet again; Hannibal can almost hear him thinking. Then, before Hannibal can prepare himself for it--and perhaps that is Will's design--Will is there, lying against him, back pillowed against his stomach, hair brushing against his ear, the stubble of his cheek tickling Hannibal's jaw. "And this?" Will asks. "Do you enjoy this, too?"

"Yes. Very much so." He hears Will take a deep breath before he lies his head back on Hannibal's shoulder. Will smells delicious, better than anything Hannibal could bake for Whisked Away, any coffee he could brew, any tea he could serve.

Bedelia was right, as she tends to be when it comes to Hannibal's inscrutable emotions. He is in over his head when it comes to one Will Graham.

Hannibal swallows before telling him, "I must confess that I fear opening my eyes on accident. It seems I am somewhat distracted." He pauses, licking his lips. "I entirely forgot we were here for dessert."

Will laughs, and it's even more beautiful up close--Hannibal's chest hasn't twisted and ached like this in such a very long time. "Can't imagine why."

"Neither can I."

"Got an idea, though. Well," says Will, "more an idea from what you've told me about you and Bedelia."

His breath is tremulous. "Why, Will. Do you mean to blindfold me?"

"It does seem a bit horrible romance novel-y," Will admits. "But I don't mind if you don't."

"I have no objections, though it will make it quite difficult to feed you your dessert," and Will laughs again, and Hannibal can feel his smile, and he wants nothing more than to turn and kiss it from his face. But he doesn't. Hannibal can wait, can be patient, no matter how much it hurts to do so.

Will shifts carefully; Hannibal hears the rustle of Will's hand squeezing into the pocket of his jeans. He turns, shoulder rubbing along Hannibal's chest. "It's nothing nice," says Will as he wraps the fabric around Hannibal's eyes. "Just my work bandana."

Hannibal inhales. His nostrils fill with the scent of Will's sweat.

"You alright?" Will asks, and his fingers stroke down Hannibal's cheek, barely there. "Look like you're gonna pass out."

"A bit overwhelmed," admits Hannibal. "I may have considered this precise scenario before, when I am alone."

"It..." Will steals the air from in front of Hannibal's face. "It suits you."

"Thank you." Hannibal grins ever so slightly. "Would you pass me a macaron? I would very much like to serve the dessert course."

"I suppose I could do that." He settles back in between Hannibal's thighs, reaches over for the box, pressing himself against Hannibal's knee as he does so. Hannibal lets his hand be taken up, and then a macaron is placed onto his palm; he can tell from the weight alone that it's one of the green teas. Will lays his head back on Hannibal's shoulder, and Hannibal flips the macaron into his fingers to follow.

"What do you taste?"

"The cookie part is bitter," begins Will. "Maybe not bitter, but it tastes the way the inside of a tea bag looks. Dusty--not like *actual* dust, but a dusting, I guess."

It occurs to Hannibal how backward this process is. Here he is, blindfolded, and Will is the one describing what he tastes. "That would be the matcha, yes. What else?"

Will's lip presses against Hannibal's fingertips as he takes another bite. "The filling is really, really sweet. For something made with a bean."

"Vanilla is a bean," Hannibal reminds him.

"Huh. Yeah, I suppose it is." Will's hands find their way to Hannibal's knees--they don't grasp, only rest. "Another bite?" He pushes the rest of the macaron into Will's waiting mouth, and Hannibal was right; he would've been too curious not to look at Will, not to seek his expression, his bliss. "There's...it's kind of tangy?"

"Cream cheese."

"Oh. No wonder I didn't recognize it. My diet is fairly boring, unless I've been fishing."

Hannibal's hand searches for the bento box. "How do you prepare your fish?" he asks.

"Given what Beverly has told me about your groceries, I was under the impression that you did not cook."

"I could invite you over and make dinner for you. Unless you're too much of a control freak to let me." The blanket makes a soft sound as Will pushes the box into Hannibal's hand. His mouth is open and waiting by the time Hannibal rests another green tea macaron on his bottom lip.

“So long as the food does not come from a cardboard box.”

Will rests more of his weight on Hannibal as he chews and swallows. “You would starve to death before you ate take-out, wouldn’t you?” That statement’s quickly followed by another-- “Fuck, I’m sorry. I didn’t even think.”

Hannibal presses a kiss into Will’s curls before he has a chance to reconsider. “I forgive you.”

“I wish I could kiss you right now,” Will says, and he sounds pained as he trips over his own syllables. “This--us, here--this is almost too much for me. But I needed to be brave, you know?”

“I can move--”

“No.” Will wraps his fingers in Hannibal’s shirt, grip firm around the buttons. “Please, don’t.”

“Overindulge today and be miserable tomorrow?” Hannibal teases, but he’s beyond relieved. To be honest, he isn’t sure he wouldn’t have found a way to persuade Will to stay put. An uglier side of him that Hannibal prefers to leave unexamined.

“Kind of, yeah.” Will snuggles his head against Hannibal’s chest. “You smell nice,” he says. “And you’re beyond patient.”

“I tend to play the long game.”

“Even so. It’s...” Will’s jaw moves against Hannibal’s sternum. “I’m glad you’re okay with me touching you, but barely letting you touch. That makes it easier.”

Hannibal takes a deep inhale over Will’s hair. He wonders, for the second time, if Will actually prefers to use this particular brand of shampoo. It’s a distasteful scent, too heavy, too masking.

“Is that how Hannibals say hello?” asks Will. There’s a touch of a smile to his voice. “Do you all smell your friends like a wild beast would?”

“There is a touch of something wild and bestial in all of us, wouldn’t you say?”

“I’ve seen it first hand,” Will reminds him, “so yes.”

Hannibal waits for the weight of the moment to settle like a second snow. “I will wait for you to kiss me. I don’t want to push you,” says Hannibal, almost a murmur.

“You *did* just kiss my hair.”

“So I did. Shall I apologize?”

Will snorts. “Only if you’re sorry.” His head shifts up, hair tickling against the underside of Hannibal’s chin. “Are you sorry?”

“Hardly.” It’s so easy, this banter between them, like they’ve been having such conversations for years instead of a handful of weeks. He knows that Will is well-read; hopefully, that will translate into rigorous intellectual discussion in the days to come, though Hannibal wouldn’t be averse to continuing this pseudosexual repartee. “Perhaps you could forgive me, anyway.”

“Perhaps,” he agrees. “I’ll consider it. Your chances of garnering my forgiveness will vastly improve with a lemon cookie. After the green tea one you already tried to feed me.”

“Greedy boy,” but Hannibal is more than happy to. Will has to take Hannibal’s hand and lead it back to him, back to his mouth. “You enjoy good food so much,” he says. “May I ask why you choose to eat so poorly?”

Will swallows, licking a stray crumb off of his lip--Hannibal knows because the very tip of Will’s tongue grazes his finger. “Habit? And I never really learned to cook--not because I didn’t want to. It just seemed wasteful, you know, possibly not cooking something correctly and then having to toss it.”

“Cooking well does take much practice,” says Hannibal. “But you said you cook fish?”

“I picked it out of someone’s head once. Could make it now with my eyes shut.” Will takes another bite of the macaron. He savors it as he slowly chews, assuming the content little hums are anything to go by. Hannibal wonders if Will even realizes he’s audible. “That’s how I learned to fish, too. It was...” Will finally lets go of Hannibal’s shirt, smoothing down the placard as he goes. “Maybe another time,” he says.

Hannibal nods and almost puts his hand over Will’s, but stops himself and goes for the bento box, instead. “You said lemon, I believe?”

“Oh, I already got it,” and so he has. “You have that one.”

“I made these for you.”

Will pulls away from Hannibal, twisting, Hannibal supposes to look at him. “To save for later, right?” But Hannibal only smirks. “There is no way I am eating five more of these, no matter how fantastic they are.”

He beckons Will back to him; after a few moments, Will does, leaning back against him once more. “I believe you invited me over for a consultation. Something regarding a stomach massage.” Will’s shoulders shift back against him; his breath comes more quickly. “Is that--”

“Acceptable, yes, very,” confirms Will, and he scoots back until he’s completely flush against Hannibal. “I prepared for that.” He pauses, then says, “That sounds wrong. I didn’t mean like that.”

Hannibal is very thankful, given Will’s closeness and the conversation, that he thought to wear compression shorts this morning.

“What I meant is that I sort of psyched myself up for it,” he explains. “After we spoke on the phone, I--God, I feel so stupid.”

“It’s no different than an actor before a performance, or an athlete prior to an important game.”

Will exhales, sounding relieved. “It sounds better that way, yeah.”

“Will it help if I talk through it?” asks Hannibal gently. “To say what I am doing before I do? As I do?”

“Yeah,” says Will. He sighs, nasally, breathily. “Why are you like this?”

“Like what?”

“Kind. How do you put up with all my--my ‘quirks’?” Will sounds frustrated with himself, or else disappointed. “Beverly, Alana, they’re just friends. There’s no expectation there.”

Hannibal lowers his head, puts his mouth next to Will’s ear. “And what expectation might that be?”

“I watch movies, TV. I know how romance works.”

“If you were any more familiar with the outside world,” Hannibal begins, “I would be somewhat insulted that you thought I was only interested in physical intimacy. Do I long to touch you? To hold you close? To kiss you? Yes, of course I do--how could I not? But I find your mind far more compelling. Our personalities are beyond compatible. I believe, given time, we could understand each other more than anyone else ever has.”

Will reaches out for Hannibal’s right hand and pulls it over to his stomach, laying Hannibal’s open palm upon it. “Keep going?” he asks in a small voice.

Hannibal can’t help the smile that blossoms on his face. As for his hand, he does nothing more than rest it on Will’s belly, letting him adjust to having it there. “The media uses sex to sell, exploiting the American appetite for illicit temptation. No one wishes to speak of it with each other; they rely on pornography, romance novels, scintillating programs and films. Sex becomes the primary function of relationships, whether temporary or permanent. But a partnership based on this alone ultimately proves meaningless.”

“It sounds like you’ve given this a lot of thought.” Will is relaxed and comfortable in Hannibal’s arms, though he adjusts slightly as he wipes crumbs off of his jeans. The bento box rustles over the sheets beside Hannibal, and then he smells adzo bean.

“I practiced psychiatry for over a decade before retiring to open my shop.”

“These are addictive,” says Will, mouth full. “So, what,” and he pauses to swallow, “sex isn’t the end game?”

“I cannot deny that...” Hannibal’s hand flexes over Will’s stomach.

“It’s okay. I’ve thought about it, too,” and Hannibal is even *more* glad that he wore his compression shorts. “But sometimes...” Will pats the top of Hannibal’s hand. “Is it weird to be as repulsed by the idea of sex as I am aroused by it?”

“There are many inexplicable and seemingly contrary facets of physical and sexual attraction. They shift and change over time, both in society and within each of us.” Hannibal clears his throat; he hardly came prepared to teach sex education today. “I could recommend some books on the subject.”

“But it’s normal?”

“Oh, very.”

“And if we never got farther than this?” he asks, voice tight. “How would your waiting, your guidance, your seemingly infinite patience pay off? What would you get from such a relationship?”

Hannibal simply says, “I would get you.”

Will snickers, amused. “If that’s a prize to you--”

“It is.”

“Well,” and Will shrugs, “okay then.” Taking a chance, Hannibal plants another kiss in Will’s hair. He giggles, boyish and beautiful; he sounds far younger than his age, but happy. Reaching over, Will takes another macaron from the box--lemon this time, sugar-sweet in Hannibal’s nose. “If you rub my tummy, I’ll tell you a story.”

“Quid pro quo?”

“Quid pro quo.”

It wasn’t as if Hannibal needed to be enticed. Even Will had expected it, having already invited Hannibal to touch his stomach. This is a new game, it would seem, and Hannibal does so enjoy those. He begins stroking Will’s belly from bottom to top, alternating hands, relishing the way it makes Will melts beneath his fingers.

“That’s...dear *God*, that feels good.” Will inhales deeply, laughs a little more, and then Hannibal smells buttercream as Will takes a bite. “You’re not the first person to feed me cookies.”

Hannibal tamps down the sudden, intense, irrational jealousy. He just keeps stroking, pressure firm and consistent. “Tell me.”

“I mentioned Denise earlier--the orderly.”

“The one who brought you the lemon creme cookies.”

“Yes.” Will pushes his stomach into Hannibal’s hands. “I said she poked them through the window, but that wasn’t exactly right.” Hannibal listens to the excruciatingly painful sounds of Will licking buttercream and crumbs from his fingers. “They called it the ‘viewing room’,” he says. “It was kind of like a closet, really. Only room for me. Kind of like in *Cool Hand Luke* --have you seen that movie?”

“I have seen very few American films,” admits Hannibal.

“There was this punishment area they called ‘the box’ where you went if you broke the rules. But I went to mine when the Feds needed information, and they needed that a lot. So I’d get stuck--” Will sighs again, very quietly. “Can you just hold me for a minute?”

“Any time you ask,” and Hannibal does, circles Will’s waist with both arms and leans his head against Will’s.

Will takes another deep breath, but he struggles more for it this time. “It really was like a box. Just a little grate for my eyes, little slats. I would stand there and they would bring these...these awful people, Hannibal, and they’d make me look at them until I pulled out what they needed to know. Sometimes for days, I think. Time passes strangely when you can’t feel time, when there aren’t even meals to measure it by.”

“They did not feed you?”

“I got water. IV nutrients, when they had to,” Will tells him. He snuffles a single time. “Sorry, it’s...I haven’t talked about it in a long time, and only the once.”

“You don’t need to tell me more, Will.”

“No,” he says, “no, I want to. Anyway, Denise would sneak in--she wasn’t supposed to come into the white room, just stay outside--”

“The white room?”

“That’s all I knew it as. It probably wasn’t white, but it was so dark until they opened the grate. Dr. Gideon said it would be better, that the sensory deprivation would make it easier for me to dive into someone’s mind. But he didn’t know how it worked any more than I did; Gideon was just cruel, that’s all.”

Hannibal wants to keep Will wrapped up and safe, wants to keep the world around him nothing but kind. But he knows such desires are selfish. Will is his own man; he has grit that likely rivals Hannibal’s own. This is not a man in need of saving; Hannibal only wishes Will were.

“Anyway, that’s why they withheld the food and gave me enough water to survive. Dr. Gideon didn’t want to give me any distraction whatsoever.”

“But Denise circumvented the rules.”

“She would bring cookies and read to me,” and Will sounds wistful now, not sad. Hannibal wonders if Will can close his eyes and relive it, then tries not to think about whether or not he can. “I couldn’t get my hand up to get it so she would twist the halves apart and stick one through the slats, and I would stand up on tiptoe and get it with my teeth.” Hannibal thinks that Will turns his head to look at him. “No offense, but nothing will ever taste better than those lemon creme cookies.”

“I wouldn’t expect them to,” says Hannibal, “but I shall endeavor to make a close second.”

Will leans across Hannibal's thigh and goes for the box. "These *are* amazing, though." Another bite, another *mmm*. "So was the tummy rub."

"Is that a hint that I should resume?"

"I still have a few cookies left," Will says, "so I think it might be for the best."

Hannibal does, continuing long after the cookies are gone, long after Will has fallen asleep in his arms, warm and full. His hand fumbles as he searches the bedside table for Will's phone. It occurs to him that he could simply remove the blindfold, but Hannibal prefers to wait for Will to, as he was the one who put it there.

Eventually, Hannibal gets the phone, then realizes that he won't be able to take a picture of them together because he can't see the touchscreen. He moves the handkerchief enough to get to the camera function, then realizes that Will might see this as a gross breach of privacy.

The movement wakes Will. "H'bal?"

"Yes?"

"Fell 'sleep."

Hannibal bites his lip in lieu of smiling. "I noticed."

"Oh," says Will. "'Kay." He wiggles slowly as he stretches. "Nap?"

"With you?"

Will nods, says, "Mmhmm," as he pulls himself over Hannibal's leg and lies down beside him.

"Are you certain?"

"Yup."

Hannibal's pulse flutters--he can feel it, has only been able to identify it since Will entered his life. "Alright." His hands are steady, but he feels like every muscle in his body should be shaking. But Hannibal lies down behind Will, and puts his arm back around him. Beneath it, Will turns back over to face him, nestles his head under Hannibal's chin.

He knows it's impossible, but Hannibal can't shake the idea that they've done this before.

Chapter End Notes

I am so awful to Will and I really should be ashamed of myself. ._.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Hey, folks! [pause] What'd I miss?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“And then you kissed, right?”

Hannibal sighs, watching the raspberry scones toast in the oven out of the corner of his eye. While he’s surprisingly relieved that Alana got her lunch to-go—Hannibal doesn’t think he could have withstood her concern for Will so soon after their day-long date—he had not anticipated Beverly and Charlie coming in for an afternoon snack. Charlie had already seemed exuberant; now, after drinking half of her triple espresso far too quickly for Hannibal’s tastes, she seems close to vibrating off of her seat.

“We did not,” he tells her.

“So what *did* you do?” Charlie puts her elbows on the counter, and her chin in her hands, and Hannibal winces. He’ll have to wipe down the glass the moment they leave.

“You stray very close to the edge of the line, Mx. Bradbury.” Hannibal turns to look at her, expression guarded, tight. It doesn't seem to do anything to discourage her. “It's rude to press for details, and I can't abide rudeness, not even from friends.”

Beverly laughs. “Unless they're named Will, anyway.”

“Caveats are important,” says Charlie in her best Hannibal impression. She twists a strand of her long red hair, curling it around her finger. “It's just that all the Whiskers are talking about how you've started actually smiling,” she explains. “I want to celebrate and squee over your happiness!”

Hannibal resigns himself to sharing minimal details. “Will introduced me to his dogs,” he tells her, “and we took a walk around his property.”

“Did you hold hands?”

“I—yes. Yes, we did.”

Charlie leans in further, both palms planted on the counter. “Did you *kiss*?”

“No, we did not.” Beverly grabs Charlie’s shoulder and gently pulls her back and out of Hannibal's personal space; he hadn't even noticed the tension in his shoulders, or how bristled he felt. “We had enjoyed lunch previously—a traditional Japanese bento—and he...”

Hannibal closes his eyes, feeling his lips curving upward. “I let him take a childhood memory.”

Charlie squeals in delight. Perhaps there’s something to sharing a private happiness, after all. Hannibal does with Bedelia, talks to her about practically every aspect of his life, but they’ve known each other so long that it’s more like speaking to a reflection in a favorite mirror. This is an enraptured audience. Hannibal’s enjoying the focused attention just as much as he does the morning academic discussions with his customers.

Beverly joins in, seemingly as caught up in the retelling as Charlie. “So you kissed before your walk? During lunch? When you got there? Come on, Hannibal. When?”

“No, there was no kissing.” He hesitates before adding, “I did feed him dessert, and then we laid in his bed and napped together.”

“Wait, wait, wait.” Charlie waves her hands back and forth, palms facing Hannibal. “Hold up. You fed him dessert.”

“Yes.”

“In bed?”

The novelty of the attention begins to wane as quickly as Hannibal warmed to it. “There was nowhere else to sit. In the living room, I mean.”

“Uh huh.” Beverly doesn’t sound convinced and Hannibal’s not certain he wants to look at her.

“Will wished for us to sit together, so he chose to lean against me, his back to my front, so as to keep our eyes apart.”

“You did *not*,” Charlie declares, Cheshire-grinned, slapping one palm against the counter. “And everyone in the chat is gonna be pissed—we totally had you pegged as the little spoon.”

“The...the what?”

“Nevermind,” says Beverly, waving her hand dismissively. “So you’re vertically spooning and eating dessert.”

“I also...” Hannibal doesn’t remember the last time he was truly embarrassed. He’s never felt less himself, or more out of character. “We decided to blindfold me. Just in case one of us forgot ourselves and sought out the other’s eyes, so as to prevent any possibility of an awkward moment.”

“Blindfolded back-to-front dessert-feeding isn’t awkward?” asks Beverly.

Charlie snorts. “Depends entirely on who you ship.”

“Okay, alright,” and Beverly playfully pushes Charlie’s face away, making her giggle. “At this point, having partaken in a scene from a made-for-TV movie, you drew him into your arms, romance-novel style—” Beverly grunts as Charlie dramatically throws herself across Beverly’s lap. “Jesus, *warn* a girl.”

“I thought a real-life reenactment was in order.”

Beverly rolls her eyes. “Look, Hannibal. Pal. You kissed him, right?”

“Or else, he kissed you?”

Hannibal coughs into his hand, then turns to look for something to polish. There's a possibility of him having overlooked one dish, or forgotten to put used coffee in the compost bin, or neglected to fully fill one of the glass jars full of loose-leaf tea.

“Wait, wait, wait—you’re telling me that you shared deep dark secrets, fed each other dessert, he *blindfolded you*—” One of the seats squeak; a pair of elbows land heavily on the counter. “Blindfolded, Hannibal, *buh-line-foal-did*,” repeats Charlie, “and you rubbed his belly, and then you laid down and had a nap.”

“To be fair, Will fell asleep on me first. Otherwise, that would be the shape of things, yes,” Hannibal says bluntly, trying to cling to a scrap of his dignity.

“And you *never kissed*?” Beverly laughs in that same odd, breathless way she has when Hannibal’s inadvertently amused her before.

“Oh my God.” Hannibal can't decide which is louder: Charlie’s disbelief, or her fingers typing rapidly on her phone. “This wasn’t tagged slow-burn,” she continues, “and now I’m invested. Anon complaint; unsubscribed; futile desire to un-kudos.”

“What did she say?” asks Hannibal, turning back around with a teacup he hasn't used in several years. There must be dust on it somewhere.

Beverly side-eyes Charlie. “Fuck if I know. I don’t speak fanfic.”

“Speak what?”

“Look, Hannibal—”

“Hopeless!” Charlie doesn't look up, fingers still rapid-fire. “You two are hopeless. Worse than a Tumblr post about clueless lesbians trying to flirt.”

Beverly rolls her eyes. “Hannibal,” she begins again, “what are you waiting for?”

Hannibal says nothing, but his hands are trembling so badly that he fears dropping the teacup. When Beverly holds her hand out expectantly, he gladly entrusts it to her. “Will wants to go slowly.”

“This isn't slow; this is continental *drift*.”

“And what would you propose I do?”

Beverly appraises him, smiling. “You could, I don't know, ask him if he'd like to be kissed?”

Hannibal fiddles with Charlie's silverware; it wasn't lined up properly. “He has difficulty with touch. I didn't want to presume.”

“Did he say he wanted to kiss you?”

“Not in so many words, to the best of my recollection.” *Did he?* Surely Hannibal would have remembered something like that, a wish spoken overtly and uncoded.

“Well, ask him, and then pencil the chosen date and time into your planner, lover boy.”

It sounds simple enough, but Hannibal doesn't think it actually is.

“And you *never kissed?*”

Hannibal eats another spoonful of chocolate ganache frosting. Why did he think Bedelia would behave any better than Beverly and Charlie? At least they hadn't outright laughed at him.

“You're the rudest confidante I've ever had,” he tells her once he's swallowed.

Bedelia snorts. “I'm also the *only* confidante you've ever had.”

“That's hardly relevant.” He drags the spoon through the frosting, creating small peaks.

“You're supposed to be supportive.”

“When you're clueless and more emotionally constipated than a Republican congressman?”

He hears Bedelia take a sip and wonders how far into her cups she must be. “In all seriousness, Hannibal: what's holding you up? Beyond your utterly unhealthy obsession.”

“That would be a significant part of it, yes.”

She sighs heavily into the phone. “You're going to have to tell him eventually, my darling. You *do* know that, right?”

“I am waiting for the best moment.” Hannibal sounds almost convincing, even to himself. Bedelia always manages to see through his ruses, though. Often before Hannibal does, which annoys him to no end.

“An engraved invitation, then?”

“Will doesn't seem like the formal invitation type.”

He can't decide if the pop of a cork or Bedelia's eye roll is louder. "Hopeless. Absolutely, completely hopeless."

"Thank you for the vote of confidence." Hannibal sticks the chocolate-coated spoon in his mouth.

"I'm confident that you're going to fuck—"

"Bedelia."

"—this up if you don't start pushing the rock, Sisyphus." He hears the slosh of a poor pour. "I'm not cleaning up the inevitable mess, either."

Hannibal stabs the ganache with the end of the spoon several times. "I wouldn't ask."

"You always ask." Another sip; a sound of disgust; the soft clink of glass on a table. "Every time," she continues. "Whenever you push yourself too hard or are tempted too much or forget how to sleep, here you are, knelt in front of my door. And I'm not doing that anymore."

The strong feeling of sudden abandonment curls in his throat, a coated pill swallowed dry. "I've been dismissed?"

"*God*, remind me never to accept alcohol-shaped gifts from Mrs. Komeda again. My taste buds will never be the same—this is so *sour*."

Hannibal stares into the frosting like a scrying pool. It doesn't work. Unbidden, he wonders if Will could pull the recipe for it out of Hannibal's head, if it would taste exactly the same when Will made it or if there would be a slight difference. How would Hannibal feel if Will was better at it, suddenly perfect? The idea is as curdling as Bedelia's words.

"Anyway, *no*, Hannibal, I'm not 'dismissing you,'" she assures him. Bedelia's voice is soft; Hannibal appreciates it. "Though I do think Will should know more about your monstrous, terrifying, *inhuman* adoration of him."

"We've spoken a little about it." *He runs as wild as I do*, goes unsaid. So does, *His darkness may be equal to mine*.

"That's a good start. But what I'm saying is that Will is good for you. I know he is. This continuing obfuscation is what's toxic. There is a great difference between being infatuated and drowning in love and being obsessed and possessed and...other words ending in 'essed'. I don't know. I'm a bit drunk."

Hannibal chuckles, setting the bowl of ganache on the counter. The fridge is simply too far away, not to mention that there's a container of fresh lemon buttercream sitting beside the cooked and peeled tomatoes, and Hannibal seemingly has no self control this evening. "Are you to be trusted when inebriated?"

"Am I *ever* to be trusted?"

"A question for another day," says Hannibal. "Yet 'in vino veritas,' I suppose."

There's rustling in the phone—Hannibal imagines that Bedelia has flopped elegantly back onto her bed. “I may not be trustworthy, but I'm always wise.”

“And a master manipulator.”

“Flatterer.” She blows a kiss into the phone. “Go sleep, darling. Have unbearably sexual dreams of your adorato.”

Hannibal's not sure he would survive such a thing.

There are no events to attend on Saturday, and no shop to open, so Hannibal decides to sleep until waking rather than setting his alarm. Beverly won't be dropping by until the afternoon; Hannibal prepped most of the dishes to send off to Will last night, leaving him entirely too much idle time today.

His dreams were full of a wild, laughing Will again; of cold mud in a colder forest; of a great feathered stag they take down with bare hands, and tear apart with their teeth. Even sleeping in, Hannibal feels exhausted when he wakes after ten, too tired to pay more attention to the clock, still off chasing an untamed boy through the woods somewhere else.

Ablutions are done both minimally and mechanically—Hannibal relegates his pre-breakfast shower to post-brunch, and allows himself the softest pajama pants and around-the-house sweater that he owns. The memory of the ortolan keeps sifting to the front of Hannibal's mind unbidden, but there's nothing he could cook for his first meal of the day that would even compare. He's tempted to brush his teeth twice and skip breakfast altogether.

Perhaps he should call Bedelia and schedule a session. Then again, Hannibal thinks ruefully, she may have rescinded her psychiatric services, as well. He'll have to find another way to discourage himself from long-denied bad habits.

For now, his teeth. He half expects to pluck feathers from his mouth, but there's nothing there. No blood or meat or bones. Even so, Hannibal hardly recognizes his own face in the bathroom mirror. His hair is in complete disarray; heavy bags hang beneath his eyes; even Hannibal's stubble seems grayer, though he knows it's only a trick of the light in conjunction with sleep-crusting eyes. Strangest of all is the ashen quality of his skin.

Hannibal knows the psychological theories well enough to make his own conjectures: an extended salient state, as well as lingering remnants of a lucid dream. The facts do little to reassure him, however. If anything, they unsettle him further.

He wanders—truly *wanders*—down to the kitchen. Coffee. Coffee will fix it. Coffee fixes *everything*. And, once it does, Hannibal can chalk this whole experience up to general fatigue.

Much to his dismay, the water is taking an ecological age to boil. *Continental drift*, Beverly repeats in his head. Hannibal's thoughts keep drifting downstream from there: Charlie's disbelief; Bedelia's disdain; his own disorder during simple his cooking tasks last night; the dream.

The dream.

Hannibal closes his eyes.

Do you see It? asks Will. Tell me you see It, too. I've never shown It to anyone.

Shown what?

It's...It's something. Will nuzzles Hannibal's shoulder, whining until Hannibal reaches out a clawed hand to drag through Will's hair. Not going to be able to think much longer, he says, not like usual. But hunt It with me, Hannibal. You know how to hunt, right?

Hannibal swallows. He does know, somewhere, he thinks. I never have. Especially not here, in this place. For the first time in the dream, Hannibal looks at Will, truly looks. He sees him, if not whatever it is Will wants to hunt, and Will is beautiful. Will sits on his haunches like an alert guard dog, hands and feet turned to match, a spatter of fur down his spine and across his shoulder blades. I've never seen anything here, or anyone.

Will meets his gaze, holds it, saying nothing. He grins, and his mouth is full of fangs, chin elongated, mouth jutting forward. I've seen you, he tells Hannibal.

The dream fast-forwards, blurred time and shapes and shadows. Will leaps and runs, pushing off of trees to propel himself further. Hannibal has never moved this fast through the forest; he glances behind him, and the brown path is long gone, yet the forest feels smaller than it did when he awoke here. His antlers tangle in a whirlwind of leaves, blown back in Will's laughing wake.

There's a howl of wolves all around him, but Hannibal isn't afraid.

Time moves again, and Hannibal watches mesmerized as a great feathered beast gores Will's right foreleg with antlers of its own. Will's scream is like music, but their eyes meet again—they're the only color here besides the path-that-was, a blue Hannibal can't comprehend, a sea he's never seen. Hannibal nods; Will nods back.

They move in tandem, like they've done this a thousand times. Hannibal leaps on the back of the beast, long talons digging into feathers and a void of flesh. Beneath him, Will slides under the monster's belly—Hannibal sees him slice through it, the creature suddenly transparent. It spurs Hannibal on; snapping his body up, Hannibal dives and rips out the beast's throat.

He and Will gorge themselves, laughing, feeding each other raw morsels, bathing in the black blood of their prey, even as Will bleeds himself.

You're hurt.

Only here, Will assures him. I'll be fine, but he frowns, gristle hanging from the corner of his mouth.

There's a primal urge to care for Will—and there's that word flashing through his mind again, “mate,” like they truly are wild things—so Hannibal follows it. He pounces on Will, body to body, and bends his head to clean the wound with his tongue.

Will growls and writhes beneath Hannibal, wrapping all four of his legs around Hannibal's body to pull him closer. Their cocks rub together, dry and rough, like honing the edge of a knife. Will pushes his wound farther into Hannibal's mouth; whether he pants in pain or pleasure, Hannibal doesn't know, but he keeps grooming the spot nonetheless.

They rut there in the soft black earth, snarling and sighing. Will's half-shifted back, and Hannibal wishes he knew how to follow him, knew how to properly kiss his way down Will's bared throat as they shudder together, practically sharing the orgasmic rush, coming hot and sticky across both of their stomachs.

Hannibal gasps back to himself so harshly that he wonders if he's been holding his breath. The kettle is whistling, steam pouring into the air. He quickly takes it off of the stove eye, then realizes he has neither set up his press nor ground the coffee.

The doorbell rings.

Looking down, Hannibal strategically adjusts himself, then opts for an apron to go over his terribly pedestrian plaid pajama pants. He tries to smooth his hair into acceptability, futile effort though it may be. Steeling himself for either making a terrible first impression or provoking a friendly jibe, Hannibal answers the door.

“You know casual Friday was yesterday, right?”

A jibe, then. “Good morning to you as well, Beverly. You're earlier than I expected.”

“I tried to call you,” she says. “Honestly, Hannibal, I pulled out every polite bone in my body just for you.” Frowning, Beverly asks, “Are you feeling okay?”

Hannibal beckons her into the house and out of the chilled Baltimore air. “I slept poorly,” he tells her, leading the way back to the kitchen. “My intention had been to sleep in—”

“Are you sure you're Hannibal? Is this *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*?”

Hannibal ignores the interruption. “I have been feeling fatigued lately,” he admits, sorting through the neatly folded stack of reusable grocery bags in the pantry.

Beverly hums in acknowledgment; Hannibal hears her pull a chair up to the counter, like this is Whisked Away and she's shown up for lunch. “Will’s been super drained, too, but you probably already know that.”

“I wasn't aware.”

A pause. “He didn't tell you?”

“We—” Why does he feel nervous again? This is *entirely* too much like lunch at the shop. “Will hasn’t contacted me since our time together on Sunday.”

An even longer pause, long enough for Hannibal to begin packing the premade entrees into the bag. “Why haven't you called him?”

“He anticipated needing some time to recover from an entire day of in-person socialization,” explains Hannibal, rearranging the containers so that the meatloaf with cremini mushrooms and balsamic reduction is on top. Hannibal thinks he’ll like it the best, and he doesn't want to risk crushing the goat cheese-stuffed pork tenderloin.

“So you're being a gentleman,” Beverly says. Her fingernails tap against the counter, five continuous notes.

“That was the intent.” Hannibal can't help but smile as he packs the two largest containers into the bag, one of tomato soup, and the other with the aburaage green beans Will had enjoyed so much. “Will was in a not insubstantial amount of pain when I left, too.”

“Why?”

“He wore his walker boots,” says Hannibal. The “macaroni and cheese” (*oh*, how that still pains him) fits in neatly over the entrees, which pleases him. He hadn't had time to draw a proper blueprint for what should be packed where. “There is a cane you are meant to bring back to him, I believe?”

Beverly snaps her fingers. “Oh my God, thank you! I always forget it. Should have time to run by my place again and grab it.”

“Good.”

“But yeah,” she says, “if he was hurting, then he was probably laid up in bed for a few days, or at least moving as little as possible.”

Hannibal takes a deep breath; the pained cry of the feral Will in his dream doesn't seem so lyrical now. “I wish he had said something.”

“And have you rush out to play nursemaid?” She makes her way around the counter, leaning against it—Hannibal can see her faded jeans in his periphery. They look like Charlie’s.

“Will's a stubborn son of a bitch. He hates asking for help, especially when he needs it the most.”

“I know,” says Hannibal, hoping the quiet tremor in his voice that he hears is undetectable to her.

Beverly must hear it, anyway, or else she thinks Hannibal is in need of the hug she gives him. It's awkward, side-to-side, but Hannibal is grateful. “You want to take care of him.”

“Yes.”

“You do realize that you're already doing that just by sending him enough lunch for two weeks, right?”

“... Yes.”

She squeezes him almost too tightly for his comfort. “So how many types of lemon cookies did you bake him this week?”

Staring at the small array of brown paper lunch sacks on the counter, Hannibal tells her, “I'd rather not say.”

Chapter End Notes

Welcome to 2018, The Year of Ship Finishing Things. This fic will be updating again!
No set schedule, but still, we're back. :D

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

I forgot how much fun this fic was to write. <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The day passes in a slow-motion blur for Hannibal, and he finds himself truly bored for the first time in several decades. As he'd suspected, brunch was an impossibility for the day; Hannibal fared no better at lunch, though he did manage to make and eat an omelet, which then sat like a rock in his stomach, because it wasn't what he wanted.

Hannibal shouldn't crave it. No matter what sort of dream he'd had the night before, nothing justifies such consumption. He doesn't *mean* to go hungry for the day, but there's no distraction from his racing, jumbled thoughts to be found. Visiting favorite moments and meals in his memory palace isn't even satisfying.

All Hannibal wants is Will and the wild hunt from his dream.

He tries to compose, but that fails, too. Hannibal's most treasured books can't hold his attention. Listening to his Victrola makes Hannibal drowsy, which is dangerous, because he'll probably return to the mysterious woods when he dreams.

Dinner is, like everything else, an utter disappointment. Hannibal takes the second extra container of tomato soup that Beverly had rolled her eyes at—"Jesus Christ," she'd said, "Will hasn't had a death in the family, and you're not a church lady."—and warms it on the stove. Instead of being hearty and comforting, it's tasteless. He knows that it's only a trick of his subconscious, but that hardly makes it better.

Hannibal retires to bed early, the sun barely set, with a gnawing pain in his stomach that he can't find it within himself to care about. Calling Bedelia tomorrow is crucial, he decides, whether she's still willing to help Hannibal or not. Finding a new therapist on the cusp of emotional emergency isn't a viable option.

He doesn't sleep, only twists and turns in the sheets. His phone goes off after a few hours of disgruntled movement, and Hannibal answers it on autopilot.

"Hi," Will says quietly.

Hannibal is suddenly more awake than he has been all day. "Hello, Will."

"I'm sorry it's been a week. Lost track of time, among other things. Happens a lot."

"I must confess to being concerned," says Hannibal, "but you requested space."

“And I’m grateful you gave it to me.” There’s a squeaking of springs on the other end of the phone—Will must be sitting on his couch. “I wasn’t expecting to hurt so much. Physically, I mean. Probably should have, since I took a long walk when I already felt like shit. Not that I regret it,” he adds hurriedly. “I enjoyed giving you the tour.”

“As I enjoyed taking it.” Hannibal hasn’t smiled like this since Sunday. “Are you feeling better?”

“Not...not really. I know I should be up and moving around, stretching the muscles and doing my physical therapy exercises. Being stubborn and staying in bed is really stupid of me, but I’m actually having to use my painkillers, and they knock me out.”

“Prescription?”

“Mmhmm. I’m glad th—Zoe!” Hannibal has to jerk the phone away from his ear. “Zoe, uninvite yourself outta that armchair. *Down*, girl!”

“Unruly children?”

Will chuckles. “Yeah. They’re getting cabin fever.” A silence settles over them like another warm body on the bed. “How are you?”

“I’ve—” Hannibal pauses, unsure if he should share how he’s truly fared or not. Especially today. There’s no real reason to worry Will. But Hannibal aches when he thinks about lying to Will, more than he already does with his small, necessary deception. “My week went well,” he says, “but I slept poorly last night.” *Did I really?* “I suppose ‘restlessly’ would be a more accurate description. It’s caused me much stress today, and a great deal of listlessness.”

“Sounds familiar,” says Will, “except mine’s been most of the week. Nothing unusual; no true comparison. You did sound tired when you picked up, and Beverly mentioned you were off-kilter.” Hannibal can see Will smile behind his eyelids. “Thank you for reminding her about my cane. And more thanks for the small army’s worth of food—I had the soup for dinner. The, um...the entire container.”

Hannibal reaches across his body to the opposite side of the bed. No one is there. “I had the soup, as well.”

“You probably didn’t binge though.”

“No.” He pinches the bridge of his nose before adding, “I actually haven’t eaten much today.”

“Well, I haven’t been able to eat much all week, so you’re still doing better than I am.” Will hums; he seems content. “It’s nice, having a fridge full of food—of *good* food. Inspiring. Makes me want to have regular meals. The inability to keep down what I eat is what’s sabotaged my week.”

Hannibal runs his hand through his hair, pushing his bangs out of his face. “Too rich?”

“Maybe a little. I think it’s mostly the painkillers.”

“Have you tried warm towels?” asks Hannibal. “Compression sleeves? Deep massage?”

“Yes, yes, and sometimes. It depends on how my hands feel.” Will sounds strangely defeated. “All of my hobbies depend on fine motor skills, and my bones never knit themselves back together correctly.”

Hannibal stretches his arm farther across the bed, turning to his side, searching. Will felt so close to him the last time they spoke on the phone; why doesn't the illusion return?

“Your hands were broken?” he asks, because Will always seems to reveal bits of his past that had been left out of Hannibal's reading.

“Almost as often as my legs,” Will says quietly. “Mostly when I was a kid—I was a scratcher, and I was a stubborn little fucker. Always aimed for their eyes. Put some orderly's out once. I think his name was...Matt something? Didn't much matter.”

It's so easy, to imagine a smaller Will, head full of long curls, his mind spirited, vicious and wild and angry. Hannibal feels an even greater kinship with him than he did before.

“Denise was always apprehensive for a few days after that,” Will continues before Hannibal can reply. “Maybe a few weeks, but I don't think it was that long. Never lasted the whole time my hands were in casts, but Dr. Gideon always had them broken again right before they finished healing. Number of times depended on how much damage I caused.”

“Arthritis?”

“And frequent sprains. Have to splint them sometimes. But I'm still as stubborn now as I was then.” Will laughs again, and it's beautiful enough for Hannibal to long to capture for a composition—of course Will would be a muse. “I love tying flies and knitting, but it takes a toll.”

“Most things in life have an associated cost,” says Hannibal, “a price we pay for the privilege of staying alive and enjoying living.”

“Truer words.”

“I would help.” It slips out of Hannibal's mouth before he can't hold it back.

Will doesn't seem insulted. “And how would you heal my broken body, Dr. Lecter?”

The phrasing makes Hannibal's pulse flutter; he simply can't help it. “You are not broken,” he says. “Only fractured.”

“You like that about me, don't you?” Will's voice is level—controlled, but not flat. “You like that I need a caring touch, and you like that I've denied that to everyone else.”

“Yes.” Hannibal feels out of control. What other secrets does Will intend to pull from him this evening?

“Why?”

But not this. Not yet. "I'm loathe to say at this time."

Will is unbearably quiet, but finally says, "That's understandable." A warmth settles lightly over the back of Hannibal's hand; he bites back a whimper—everything feels so *real*. "I don't mind, you know."

"Which part?"

"That you want to heal me, even if only for a moment." The touch moves to Hannibal's forearm, squeezing gently. "You're stubborn, too. I'll let you, when I'm able." He audibly inhales, then whispers, "When it hurts too much."

Hannibal flips his arm over, sliding his hand up to meet the hallucination of Will's. "I'd like that." He licks his lips; his mouth is dry. "You must also understand that I don't appreciate how you were hurt. Your confinement and abuse. The effects of the invasive experimentation that you have shared with me. All of it is despicable, and none of it condonable."

"I know. At least, it's the conclusion I've arrived at this week, concerning the nature of your feelings surrounding my incarceration. I've ultimately accepted them, but that's the other reason it took me a week to get back to you."

Hannibal's breath is tremulous, and his hand is shaking. He's so close to confession. *Too* close—Hannibal can't, not until he's certain Will would be completely receptive. Will's understanding can only stretch so far at a time. The whole truth would be too much right now. Will knows that Hannibal is aware of the commonly known details from the one and only interview Will gave. As to how many psychological treatises and papers and subsequent analyses exist? The number of presumptions and hypotheses regarding his life? Hannibal cannot say.

And thus, he cannot say anything else.

What Hannibal *does* tell Will is, "That's likewise understandable."

"Are we still playing quid pro quo? Or is it even-Stephen now?"

"I know something you don't know?"

"Do you, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal turns to lie fully on his side; his arm tingles, little pinpricks, like it's fallen asleep. "I daresay we both do."

"No," says Will. "No, you're perfectly aware of both what you know and what you've lived. I'm simply sieving through the breadcrumbs."

"Fishing?"

There's a shimmer to the air, but it disappears in an instant. "I'm a good fisherman, even when the fishing's accidental."

The skin around Hannibal's eyes wrinkle. "Especially then."

"Revisit the subject at a later date?"

"If you like." Hannibal moves his hand reluctantly, palm flat beside his face. "What would you prefer to talk about?"

Will clears his throat. "How was your week?" he asks.

"Nothing out of the ordinary. I'm continuing to work on the perfect cup of matcha. Thus far, Chiyoh's still puts mine to shame."

"Competitive much?" Hannibal swears the mattress shifts. "Or just prideful and vain?"

"How rude you are, Mr. Graham."

"And what's to be done about that?"

Hannibal's mind runs as wild as the Will from his dreams. He glances across the room, and *oh*, there is Will, legs splayed in the armchair, hands running down his scarred body. Will drags a single fingertip over his cock, panting—

The vision's head snaps up; he smirks at Hannibal, then abruptly disappears.

"What would you propose?" Hannibal is going to die here, staring at nothing, wondering where it went, arousal curling hopelessly in his belly. "What should be done about a rude boy?"

A heavy, unsteady breath. "I've never done this before," admits Will, more of a conspiratorial hiss than an innocent mumble. "Fuck, I've never even successfully had sex."

Of course he's a virgin. Yes, this is definitely going to be how Hannibal dies, taking his secrets and his sudden erection to his grave.

"Successfully?" Hannibal manages to ask. His voice may have broken, a return to pubescence, but he doesn't care. "That implies an attempt."

"Her name was Molly. We had several good dates—she was a volunteer at the shelter I raise money for. I pushed myself to be social and be in public. It was hard, but I tried."

"What happened?" Hannibal resolutely clenches one hand in the sheets and the other in the pillow.

"I accidentally looked in her eyes in the middle of fucking her and brought up her dead husband. They had sex in that bed the morning of the day he died and...yeah, it was beyond awkward."

There's something strangely alluring about the potential for Will reading Hannibal mid-coitus. "Then she couldn't truly appreciate you."

Will's breath puffs against the speaker. "And you could?"

"Yes," Hannibal says, no hesitation.

"Everything?"

"Every facet of you."

"How would you do it?"

Hannibal laughs, lowly, darkly, promising. "With my hands."

"Oh god," says Will, his groan almost imperceptible. "I...I want you to touch me."

"I could tell you where I'd touch," Hannibal suggests. "Would you like that?"

"You have to fucking *ask*?"

"I prefer consent in most things, yes."

"You're wonderfully ridiculous," Will tells him, voice warm, fond and passionate all at once. "Or have you never done this, either?"

"Over the phone? No."

"And...elsewhere?"

Hannibal's voice is smooth when he says, "My hands are exceptionally well-practiced."

"Oh." A heartbeat, and Hannibal doesn't know which of them it belongs to, in spite of the impossibility of hearing Will's. Nevertheless, Hannibal feels the echo of a heart against his ear, as though his pillow is Will's chest.

The sensation is real enough for Hannibal to pull the pillow out from beneath his head and lay his arm across it, instead, nestling it beside him. Maybe he is as ridiculous as Will claims, but Hannibal caresses his pillow, anyway.

Will's breathing hitches.

Before Hannibal can determine whether it is correlation or causation, Will demands him to, "Tell me where." There's nothing but confidence and authority in Will's voice; Hannibal could get drunk on it, glut himself with the sudden power behind Will's words.

"I would follow your scars," Hannibal says, "should you allow it."

"Gladly."

Hannibal closes his eyes; it's easier to picture Will that way, a *real* Will, lying supine on the floor of the nave of the Norman Church in Palermo. The perfect sacrificial lamb, pure and willing, yet secretly, utterly vicious.

“A wolf in sheep’s clothing,” mutters Hannibal.

“Aren’t we both?” Will grins up at him, his eyes sly. “I wish I knew where we were.”

Hannibal’s eyes flicker beneath their lids. For a moment, there are sparks instead of sacred walls. “How do you know we are anywhere unusual, at all?”

“I didn’t,” Will says, “but you seem like the type to live inside your head. Like me.” There’s a phantom hand on Hannibal’s cheek, turning his face to Will’s, and they can look in each other’s eyes now, joined together in this imagined space, if only in Hannibal’s mind. “So where would you take me to touch me, Hannibal?”

The words spill helplessly from Hannibal’s lips. “At the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. It is a Byzantine chapel that was constructed for Norman kings.” Hannibal threads his fingers through Will’s long curls, a saintly halo here. “The throne is long since gone,” continues Hannibal. “The empty spot is an ideal place to express my devotion.”

“And are you? Devoted, I mean.”

“Very much so.”

Hannibal’s pillow expands and retracts once. “Show me,” Will says, urgency in his voice, and Hannibal feels heat beneath his hand.

“I would begin with the burns along your hairline,” Hannibal begins, “tracing them with my fingertips first, my lips following close behind.”

“Kiss it and make it better?” Will’s breathless, already winded—

“You’re touching yourself,” and now Hannibal’s lungs are the ones that refuse to work.

“Should I not?” The smallest of gasps, nothing at all, really. “*God*, Hannibal. Do you have any idea how badly I want you? How much I want your skin against mine? How much it hurts to not really be ready for that in any way whatsoever?”

Hannibal palms his cock over top of his pajama pants for the first time. “I will wait for it,” he says. *Darling*, he thinks. *Beloved*. “I will be here for you, whenever you are.”

“Don’t deserve you. Not *any* of you, not even the pieces you lock up in the pantry of your skull.” Will pants—he sounds frustrated. “Too close.”

“Prolonging it?”

“Stopping it. I’m going to wait for you, too, goddammit.” Hannibal hears Will pound the bed with his fist; the vibration of his own mattress is muted and faint. Will groans, the wrong kind. “Fuck it,” he says, “keep talking to me.”

Hannibal doesn’t want to come, either, not without Will’s hand. He clasps his hands together on his chest, lying on his back again, just as Will does in Palermo. “What would you have me

say? That I have you cradled in my arms, my mouth tracing the line of your jaw, there beneath the mosaics of Christ and the saints and the angels?"

"You would tease me under the watchful eyes of God?"

"Where else?"

Will barks a laugh, loud enough to echo through the nave. "What are we," he asks, "the *Pietà*?"

His cock still throbs against its confines. "I am hardly your mother."

"And I am hardly the messiah."

"Yet I worship your body, all the same."

"*Fuck*." Hannibal would swear Will was stroking himself again if he didn't know better. "I'd never have taken you for a dirty talker." Will bites his bottom lip—Hannibal sees it clearly in the shaft of light provided by his memories.

He goes on. "The scars beneath the line of your shoulders are numbed by deep tissue damage ___"

"How did you know?"

"I was a physician, you may recall." Will's smile does nothing but grow; he turns his head toward Hannibal, pressing his forehead to Hannibal's upper arms. "They would naturally require a heavier touch, I believe. Suction; teeth; rough treatment."

"Yes," Will agrees, "yes, *please*, because—"

"You're not fragile." Pushing Will's hair out of his face, Hannibal adds, "I know that, as well."

"What *don't* you know?"

Hannibal doesn't know how to answer that, so he decides to ignore the question. "The track marks are a road for my thumbnail and the tip of my tongue, down to the raised red skin that circle your wrists. I'll suck bruises there to match the ones I placed on your arms. Every place they touched, I will touch in turn. When you look at yourself, those won't be the only events you remember." He can't stop tears when his eyes are already closed, but Will reaches up to catch them, giving Hannibal benediction. "I cannot cure you for more than a moment," Hannibal continues, choked. "That will hardly keep me from trying."

Will is silent long enough to crucify. Finally, he breathes deeply, steadier than Hannibal feels. "What of my hands, Doctor?" he quietly asks. "You use yours; how would you treat mine?"

"A capsaicin cream." Hannibal pauses. "This is hardly a sexually stimulating conversation."

“I beg to differ.” Will cheeks bloom strawberry. “Maybe I like the idea of you taking care of me just as much as you do.”

“Are you still hard? Are you still hot to the touch? Just for me?”

“Only,” says Will, and the possessive thrill runs straight from Hannibal’s heart to his groin.

“I would make one,” Hannibal says, continuing before he can make a claim, “a cream, specifically for your hands. Rub it into the skin—I’d wash them first, so, so carefully, Will.”

“...Lovingly?”

Hannibal shudders. “One could argue intimately.”

“More, Hannibal.” There’s nothing but sin to be found. “Give up the rest.”

How could Hannibal refuse? “Wash and anoint and wrap them in gauze, like a comfort and a shroud, like a shield. And I would hold them close, so you might be convinced to rest them, and to also rest yourself.”

“But what if I wanted to use them on you in return?”

It’s nothing more than a simple question; it shouldn’t affect Hannibal like this. His stuttered moan says differently.

The bed moves, harshly, unignorable.

“You came.”

All Hannibal can say is, “Hmm.”

“You stopped touching yourself when I did. And before you can ask, I *know* you did, if for no other reason than you wouldn’t lie to me about that if I asked.”

Hannibal remains inarticulate. “I believe that would be check. Will?”

“Dr. Lecter?” How he can say anything that lasciviously, Hannibal may never know.

“Come for me, since you cannot come with me.”

The sound of Will spitting into his palm is obscene, an act put on specifically for Hannibal, given he stroked himself dry before; Hannibal would surely have heard if Will hadn’t. Hannibal can’t picture them in the chapel any longer. Every noise and smell and feel of the present is far more real than anything Hannibal’s brain could concoct. But he memorizes the repetitive *ahs* and the pitch of Will’s pleasure when he comes.

Most of all, he immortalizes the sound of his own name cried from between Will’s grit teeth.

I think I've settled on Tuesday as "Update A WIP" day. Next week will be [*Ursa Major Arcana*](#). Hooray!

End Notes

[[about me](#)] [[tumblr](#)] [[twitter](#)]

I maintain a [pinterest board](#) for this fic! Don't make everything on it at once.

Kudos and comments validate my existence. <3

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